


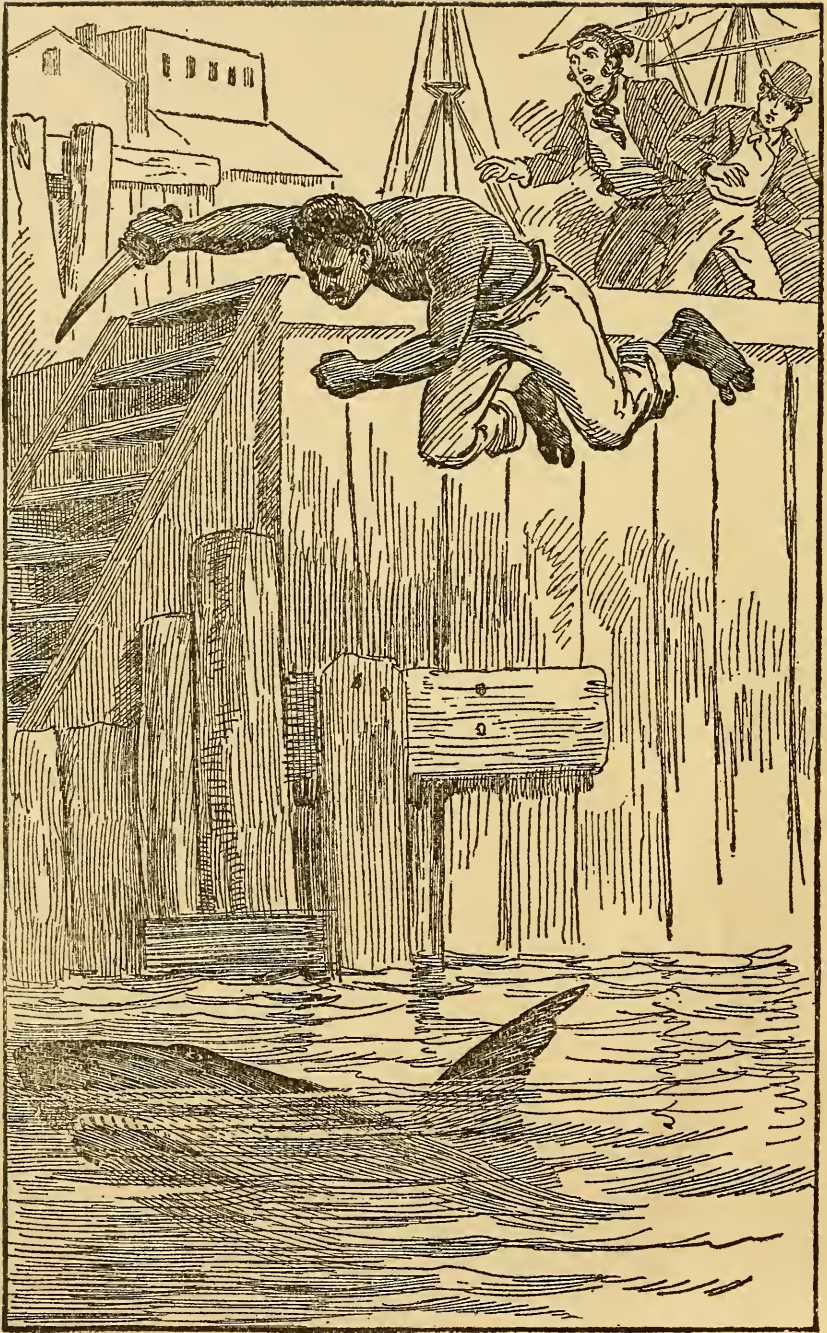
THE KING'S PARDON

By ROBERT OVERTON





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Head first, the long blade held straight before him, he hurled himself upon the hideous animals.—Page 122.

THE KING'S PARDON

A Story of Land and Sea

By ROBERT OVERTON

ILLUSTRATED

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THE KING'S PARDON.

Part II.

CHAPTER I.

AT SNARESBROOK COLLEGE—"CALLED HOME."

I SAY again, Bart Arber, that you're the son of a convict, and have no right at school here with the sons of gentlemen."

"Peter Rudge, ever since I came here you've tried to make things hot for me. I interferred to stop your bullying and sneaking, and you've never forgiven me. I've forgiven you a lot, but now that you've insulted the memory of my father you've got to fight. If ever a fellow deserved a thrashing, you deserve what I'm going to give you. As I don't believe that anything under a blow would make you face a fair fight, put up your fists and—take that."

The first speaker took it—without saying "thank you."

"It" was a blow straight from the strong shoulder of the sturdy boy who had challenged him ; a blow that sent him staggering backwards. With an effort he saved himself from falling,

and cast a rapid glance round, as if to ascertain whether a way of escape were open for him. But already the cry of "a fight" had been raised; already the little group around the quarreling couple had swelled in numbers, and from all parts of the playground, the enclosed field that skirted it, and from the college buildings, other boys were rushing to the spot—and he realized that he must fight, or stand a self-confessed coward in the face of all the school.

When it was seen that the combatants were to be Bartholomew Arber and Peter Rudge—a nicely-matched pair of old enemies—the excitement visibly increased, and a shout went up.

"It'll be the best fight this year," declared several boys gleefully.

The preliminaries were few and quickly arranged. Stripped to their shirts, the two lads faced each other.

While they are fighting, let me give you a few general details of time, place, and circumstance.

First, as to the time of our story. "Go forward" is the best motto that can actuate the conduct of boys as well as of men, and "go forward" is the advice that I always like to give to all the boys I have anything to do with—forward in your studies, forward in your sports, forward in everything that will make you better and bigger and wiser and stronger. But in introducing you to Snaresbrook College at the period of the

fight with which our first chapter has opened, I must bid you "come back"—back as far as those stirring times when your grandfathers had living fathers—back to the time when England, at war on land and sea, was struggling all over the world against the giant power of Napoleon and his allies. Our armies were on the Continent, our fleets arrayed to guard our shores from invasion—our battle ships roamed every sea to protect our commerce and our colonies.

Snaresbrook College is at the present day what it was then—one of the largest private schools in England, about eight miles from the metropolis, and just inside Epping Forest. Houses, and colonies of houses, have sprung up in its neighborhood since the days of which I write, when it stood alone, save for a few scattered mansions where wealthy City merchants lived. Gipsy encampments were pitched then where "desirable suburban residences" are "to be let or sold" to-day. The forest glades were undisturbed by the hoot of the railway engine, and knew not the tinkle of the 'cyclist's bell. Nearer and nearer has crept the great city from which it seemed then so far away.

Bart Arber had been at the college about twelve months, Peter Rudge about two years. Each was about sixteen, each had come from the same county—the former from Yarmouth and the latter from Norwich. Bart's passionate statement that the other had been his enemy since he entered the

school, that he bore him a bitter grudge for having interfered to prevent his bullying of small boys on one hand, and his "sneaking" to the masters on the other, was a true one.

The adventures through which we are going to follow our boy hero are to commence so soon, and are to take us so far from the little life of Snaresbrook College into the great life of the world outside its walls, that I need not linger to tell you more about the place and its inmates now.

Four rounds had been fought; in three Bart had proved victor. He bore marks of some hard hitting, but came well up to time for the fifth round, facing his antagonist with steady eyes and a bold front. Not so with Peter Rudge—it was evident that he had had about enough. Just as Arber closed with him to throw him for the fourth time, a boy on the fringe of the crowd gave a loud and peculiar whistle. A general stampede was the instant effect, for the sound was a warning that the whistler had sighted the headmaster. To right and left scattered the alarmed spectators of the fight, the supporters of the almost fainting Peter carrying him off with them. In the center of about half-a-dozen of his firmest friends Bart stood his ground. In fact, there was now no time to escape, for Doctor Barfield had already reached the quadrangle, and was only a few score yards off. There was nothing for the boys to do but to "face it out" as best they could. Nearer and nearer the stern-faced

old Doctor approached. Bart and his companions held their breath. Well they knew the law that prohibited fighting—well they knew the punishment that awaited the breakers of that law. Doctor Barfield neither quickened his pace nor made it less slow. He walked calmly on until he reached the little group, then he halted and fixed his eyes upon the central figure.

“Arber?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Put on your coat.”

Bart obeyed him instantly.

“Precede me into my study.”

“Yes, sir.”

The lad walked on towards the schoolhouse. Without even looking at the other boys, who expected that at the least they would be questioned as witnesses, the head-master followed close at his heels. Across the playground into the schoolhouse, up the first flight of stairs, till he stood outside the dreaded study—here Bart paused. The Doctor stepped to the door, opened it and entered, Bart entering behind him and quietly closing the door.

Then his master turned to him. Those kind eyes in that stern old face gazed steadily at him. The boy endeavored to meet unflinchingly the eyes fixed upon him, but his gaze fell before Doctor Barfield's keen scrutiny. He knew that his shirt was torn and his face bleeding a little—he was uncertain as to the color of his left eye,

and was not sure that his nose was on quite straight.

"My boy," said Doctor Barfield—and Bart could not help thinking that his voice was strangely kind in the circumstances—"go to your room ; wash yourself, change your clothes, pack up your box. You are to return to your mother at Yarmouth to-night."

"Return home, sir !" cried the startled lad. "Oh, don't punish me by dismissal, Doctor. It would break my mother's heart if I were to return to her disgraced. I know I did wrong, sir—I own I was fighting. But don't expel me, sir—give me any other punishment you like—but don't send me away, sir—don't expel me !"

"I saw no fight—I ask nothing about it," returned Doctor Barfield quickly. "You are not expelled, Arber—on the contrary, I hope you will soon be with us again. But your mother has written to me to send you home at once."

"Is she ill, sir ?"

"I fear so ; but her letter is short and gives few particulars. Go and get ready, my boy. After you have had a good meal, John shall drive you to catch the night coach."

Bart slowly left the room. In less than an hour he was ready. The news that he had been sent for from home had traveled quickly amongst his comrades, and he had a host of hands to shake in farewell. Many of the boys loudly congratulated him on winning his fight with Peter Rudge,

who watched the hand-shaking and heard these congratulations with evident chagrin.

"The fight was neither lost nor won," he said ; "it hasn't been fought out yet."

Bart hesitated a moment, and then walked straight up to his recent antagonist and held out his hand. "Peter," he said frankly, "we can finish the fight when I come back if you like. But suppose we call it a drawn battle and shake hands?"

"Bravo, Bart Arber?" cried a number of voices ; but Rudge turned sullenly aside, and thrust his hands deeper into his pockets.

"You want to shirk out of it," he sneered ; "but you struck the first blow, and our fight will never be finished till I've paid you out."

As he walked off, John the coachman was seen driving round to the front of the house with the Doctor's gig.

Bart uttered a few more last good-byes, and hurried to Doctor Barfield's room.

The head-master shook him almost tenderly by the hand. "Good-by, my boy," he said ; "and God bless you."

"Good-by, sir—and thank you for all your kindness to me," replied Bart in a voice that wasn't so steady as usual.

"Arber," said Doctor Barfield earnestly, still holding his hand, "there is a secret in your life. You are about to hear it from your mother's own lips."

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET IN BART ARBER'S LIFE.

LESS than an hour's drive across the bleak countryside brought Bart and John to the old "Angel" hotel at Ilford, where they awaited the arrival of the coach, which made a halt at the "Angel" to change horses.

An outside seat was vacant, and this Bart promptly secured. After bidding his companion a friendly good-by, he clambered up and made himself as comfortable as possible for his long, cold journey. The roads were heavy, and several times the coach was delayed. The gloom of the chill November evening of the following day had settled over land and sea when Yarmouth was at length reached.

Leaving his luggage to be sent on after him, Bart crossed the river and walked rapidly on towards what is now the populated suburb known as Gorleston.

It was five years since he had last trodden that road ; for his twelve months at Snaresbrook College had been preceded by several years' stay at a smaller school on the other side of London. It

was five years since he had left the home to which he had been suddenly and unexpectedly recalled. His mother had visited him, but he had never returned to her.

In about half-an-hour he saw the lights of his mother's house gleaming from the cliff top. His heart was in his mouth as he opened the gate of the garden surrounding the trim-built little villa. The click of the latch was heard by eager ears inside. The next moment the door was opened, and a bright light fell on the lawn and along the pathway that led through it to the house.

Holding a lamp over her head, Mrs. Arber stood at the porchway. The light above her fell upon her sweet, sad, beautiful face—a face with tender lips and loving gray eyes—a face that was very pale, and bore the impress of sickness and sorrow and suffering.

“Mother!”

“My boy!”

For a few moments she held him from her, looking at him with love-hunger in her eyes. Then she pressed him again very closely to her breast.

To Bart's eager inquiries she only replied :

“I will tell you everything by and by. You are cold and tired after your long journey—you must first get warm and cosy, and must do full justice to the meal that will be ready for you in a few minutes.”

It was with a trembling voice, later on, that

she commenced her long reply to his reiterated question :

“ Mother, why have you sent for me ? ”

“ Because I feel that the time has come when it is right that you should know all that I am going to tell you. I might have left untold the long, sad story for a little while had I not felt so ill, so very ill—and I would not like you to hear the story first, Bart, from any lips but your mother’s.

“ Twenty years ago, when I was only a year or two older than you are now, two men loved me and sought my hand in marriage. One was Peter Rudge, the father of your schoolfellow, and the other was—your father. Only just before I wrote to you I learned that you and young Peter were schoolmates.

“ We all lived in the neighborhood of Norwich. I was the dowerless daughter of a widowed mother. The man I disliked and refused was even then, young as he was, the richest solicitor in the county, for he had inherited his father’s property with his father’s business. The man I loved and accepted was the man whose name you bear, my boy. He was the son of a country gentleman with a somewhat encumbered estate.

“ We married ; and then his father, who had set his heart upon his marrying an heiress he had selected for him, disowned him, and cast him adrift to sink or to swim. Trained for no profession, brought up to follow no calling, what

was he to do? After many disappointments, he obtained a situation as clerk in the great house of Farrar and Company, bankers and merchants, of Norwich and Yarmouth. Gaining the confidence of his employers, his position in the firm gradually improved. By and by, his duties being largely, if not chiefly, in the Yarmouth office, we bought, with my mother's help, this house and the ground upon which it stands. And here we were happy, very happy, especially when you came to cheer our lives with the prattle of your baby lips, and the sunshine of your baby smiles.

"Grandmother lived with us; but when you were about ten years of age she died."

"I remember," said Bart slowly.

"With her died a legacy, an annuity, which she had always insisted upon sharing with us, her children. About the same time we became unexpectedly involved in several losses and considerable expenses, and to relieve the strain upon us, your father at length effected a mortgage on our little property, our house and furniture, for five hundred pounds. The man who advanced that money was his old rival, his old and unforgiving enemy, Peter Rudge, the lawyer. He had never forgiven me for refusing him—never forgiven your father for winning what he had lost—my own poor hand and heart. To my last hour (though he is dead, and I would think less bitterly of him if I could) I shall believe that he advanced this money with the deliberate hope of ruining us,

the deliberate intention of creating an opportunity to do so. The mortgage he held was to be a weapon in his hands—his cruel and wicked hands. As we afterwards had bitter cause to know, its terms and conditions were much more than ordinarily stringent, and unfairly in his own favor.

“A few weeks more than five years ago, my husband—the father whom you have never seen since—was despatched to London by Mr. Farrar on some confidential business for the firm, a part of the business involving the collection of considerable sums of money. The night before he was to start on his journey, Mr. Rudge came here and demanded the return of his money, immediately and in full. It appeared that he had given poor father formal notice of his intention some little time before, and then allowed him to understand that the notice would not be acted upon. In vain we pleaded for time.

“‘Pay me my money, or I sell you up and turn you out.’

“‘But my wife—my wife and little one!’ urged father. ‘Remember old times, Peter.’

“‘I do remember them,’ was the sneering reply. ‘As for your wife and the brat, they’ll be turned out with you.’

“Peter Rudge had shown his hand at last. His final words were :

“‘If your journey takes you the two or three weeks that it’s likely to, you’ll have no home here to return to.’

“ ‘Cheer up, lass,’ was my dear one’s farewell the next morning. ‘This journey can’t be postponed, but once in London I’ll find out some old friends who will contrive to help me. If necessary, I’ll even ask Mr. Farrar to take over the mortgage. Rudge can’t carry out his threat for a few days, and in the meantime I’ll raise the money somehow.’ ”

A fit of weeping prevented Mrs. Arber from continuing for several minutes. Bart kissed her lovingly, and slipped his hand in hers. When she spoke again she spoke more rapidly, as if eager now to finish.

“After he had been in London a week, I received a letter from him—a brief letter, written in evident haste and excitement. An old friend had lent him five hundred pounds to pay off Rudge, to whom he had already despatched the money. He would tell me all about it on his return. He hoped to start in a couple of days, for he had been much quicker in doing his business for the firm than he had anticipated. He had already collected for them more than a thousand pounds, which he was bringing with him. That was all. But oh ! how glad the good news made my heart. How anxiously, how eagerly I awaited his coming.

“He did not come. The days passed—a week. He did not come. A fortnight passed. He did not come. Suspicions had been aroused, and inquiries set on foot. He was found in the London

Hospital. On the night of the day he had written to me, two men had driven him there in a closed vehicle. They left him there, saying that they had found him in a dazed and suspicious condition in the Romford Road beyond Stratford. He had been in fever and delirium ever since. He was just recovering when the officers of the law arrested him.

“The money he had collected for Farrar and Company had been almost all paid him in Bank of England notes. Most of the numbers were traced. Two of the notes the numbers of which were found in the books of the firm’s debtors—the notes which had been paid him against his own receipt—were found sewn up in the lining of his cloak. More than half the notes which he had sent to Peter Rudge in payment of the five hundred pounds were also identified as notes that had been paid him as Farrar’s representative.

“Where was the rest of the money? He was charged with its embezzlement.

“You had been already sent away, my boy—in the ignorance in which you have been kept ever since, till to-night. When the news of my darling’s arrest reached me, I was stricken with brain fever, and lay ill and helpless for weeks, almost for months.

“When I recovered, all was over. Lawyer Rudge (who died suddenly a few days afterwards) had instructed the prosecution, which was conducted mercilessly, relentlessly, cleverly, success-

fully. The verdict was 'Guilty'—the sentence, Transportation for fourteen years to Botany Bay."

With a great sob poor Bart raised his head.

"Oh, mother, mother, mother! Then my father is a convict?"

"Yes, my boy; your father is a convict."

CHAPTER III.

BART'S RESOLVE.

MRS. ARBER had not spoken without many painful pauses, when emotion choked her voice. As she finished, she realized that the task she had set herself had almost exhausted her, but she compelled herself to answer the few questions that Bart could not refrain from asking, explaining to him that an unexpected bequest from his grandfather (who repented at death his long years of harshness towards his son and his son's wife) had enabled her to keep up the home and provide for herself and him.

"Doesn't father write to you?"

"No. Not even on the rare occasions when the regulations would permit him. Not one of my letters has he ever answered."

"His old friend from whom, as he wrote you, he borrowed the five hundred pounds in London—what of him? Did he not at the trial . . ."

"Of the trial itself you shall read to-morrow such details as were published. It will always be a bitter thought to me that I could not stand by his side. Before I recovered fully from the illness

caused by the shock of his arrest, he was already on his way across the seas."

"Mother," said Bart firmly, "all that there is for me to know let me know now, to-night. Show me now the newspaper report of the trial."

"You are right," said his mother slowly, as she rose to leave the room. "I will fetch it."

Bart rose also, and walked to the window, from which he flung aside the heavy curtains and peered into the gloom outside.

How wild and dark the wintry night had grown! The wind was howling round the lonely house, beating in stormy gusts against its walls. The air was thick with snowflakes, which were falling rapidly from the black sky to the white earth. The sound of the sullen sob of the angry surf below was borne upward from the beach.

Young Arber turned as his mother re-entered the room, and took from her hand the paper she held. He read in silence the brief account of his father's trial and conviction, she watching him with swimming eyes. Twice he read the pitiless lines that repeated the story of his father's fate. Then he bowed his head in his hands.

When again he raised it, a light, a look, was on it that had never been there before. His whole face, his whole demeanor, had altered. During the last few painful minutes he had grown! Not in stature, but in strength of will, power of determination.

So marked was the change, that although his

lips had uttered no words, his startled mother cried,

“Bart, what is it?”

His voice, too, had altered. He spoke more like a man than a boy as he replied,

“Mother, my father is innocent. The mystery surrounding his terrible misfortune must be solved. God helping me, I will clear it. The man who lent him that money in London holds the first clue. But to find him I must first find my father. From his own lips I must hear the true story of his visit to London, and of all that happened there. More must have been said at the trial than you know of, or this newspaper records—how much more there is to know than we can now ever learn otherwise only he can tell us. I am going to him. When we know all, God will help us to act upon the knowledge so as to prove his innocence and secure his release. He *is* innocent—I know it—I feel it. But far away from you, and me, and home he is suffering the fate of a guilty man. Mother, I am going to save my father!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST CLUE.

As Bart ceased speaking, a vivid flash of lightning lit up the darkened window. Almost instantly followed a thunder-crash that appeared to shake the house to its very foundations. Then loud cries rose from the beach, where—from the scattered cottages that dotted the shore of the river's mouth—a little group of hardy fishermen had gathered.

What a splendid lot of fellows our coast fishermen are ! Where are stouter hearts, stronger sinews, firmer nerves—where pluck more dauntless, cooler, bolder courage—than among the vikings who live by the marge of the seas that carried their forbears to our rocky shores ? Where will you find optimism grander, sublimer, than that which impresses the whole body of British sea-fishermen as one man, from the coming of the first to the going of the last visitor, that it is always a fine day for a sail ?

A furious E. N. E. wind was blowing, and the crested waves were rolling high, and breaking in long lines of white surf upon the low-lying sands.

The fishermen were looking seaward—out to-

wards where a disabled schooner, her sails blown away and her main-mast gone by the board, was drifting to her doom upon the shoals. It was only when the lightnings flashed that they could see her ; but they had seen enough to know that nothing could save her.

“Are we to stand here idle, helpless—doing nothing ?” impetuously cried Bart, who had joined the little group.

“We can do naught to save her, sir,” said a big fisherman slowly—“and naught to help the poor fellows aboard of her yet. She’ll be on the sands long before daybreak. But she’s light, and will drift in close enough for some of ’em to make for the beach. At break o’ day—if she doesn’t break up before—the sea may ha’ gone down a bit, and we’ll launch a boat as soon as it’s got a chance to live.”

Bart recognized the speaker as an old friend of his before he went away to school. The man had altered so little, the boy so much, that the latter’s quicker recognition was not to be wondered at.

“Joe,” he said earnestly, “whenever you go, may I go with you ? When you put out to the wreck, will you take me with you ?”

Old Joe turned his lantern and looked down at the youngster’s eager face.

“Why, Master Arber—it *is* Master Bart !—no, no, my lad, we shall have no need for your young arms.”

“Ours’ll be work for men, not boys,” said

a coarse evil-living looking fellow contemptuously.

Joe turned on him quickly.

"A good boy's more use than a bad man," he said, "and I'd rather have this lad than I'd have you at any work, Wrecker Mike."

"Who says I'm a wrecker?" was the angry retort. "I'm as honest a fisherman as any of you."

"You're not a fisherman—and you're not one of us at all. It's a long time since *you* did an honest day's work. So much for your talk of being 'honest.'"

"What do you all suspect me of?" demanded Mike.

"We *suspect* you," said Joe, with an air of judicial precision, "of being guilty of everything that we don't *know* you to be guilty of!"

This sweeping implication was evidently considered to have been very fairly and properly expressed, for it was received with murmurs of general approval.

"Wrecker" Mike, with a scowl upon his face, drew off a little.

"Who's that man, Joe?" asked Bart. "I don't remember ever seeing him here before."

"Nor he don't belong here by rights," replied the old fisherman. "He come here a matter of a year or two ago, where from we don't know. One way and another, he's got the worst character of anybody in the place—Black by name and black by natur', that's what Wrecker Mike is."

Once more the lightning's forks of flame revealed the fated schooner. She had drifted closer in; she was not far now from the sands where she must touch bottom and be crushed to pieces by the sea.

"She'll ground on the North Sand, lads," said Joe.

"Aye, aye, Joe—and before long now,"

"Master Bart," cried the old man, "you can't help *us* exactly, but you can do something for the poor fellows aboard that schooner all the same. You can't help any of 'em to get ashore, nor you can't help us in bringing any of 'em ashore by and by. But when any of 'em do reach shore, then'll be your time. They'll be starved, and froze, and drowned. Run up home again. Light every fire in the house. Get hot water ready, and food and blankets."

"Aye, lad—that's it, master," said a number of voices.

Bart needed no urging. He sprang up the cliff, and dashed into the room where he had left his mother. Soon, aided by Mrs. Arber's one faithful servant, they were both busily engaged in preparing help for the shipwrecked crew.

With the first streak of dawn Bart was again on the beach, where Joe Forrest and his plucky comrades were just launching their boat. The storm was a little less violent; the seas were not quite so high. The wind had shifted a point or two to the north, but blew still almost a gale.

Stout hearts must prove their prowess, brawny arms their strength, before the boat, over such a sea, against such a wind, could reach the wreck's side. But in sprang her crew, old Joe seizing the tiller, and into the foam she plunged, Bart giving a ringing cheer as she dipped her bows.

Then he stood watching her slow, slow progress. Sometimes a wave drove her back, another urged her forward, another drove her from her course. In the hollow of one wave she disappeared for seconds that seemed like minutes, to be flung into sight again on the foamy crest of another. But—tossed and buffeted and driven, her straining rowers drenched with the cold spray—she held on still, creeping nearer and nearer to the wreck, from which all the while something was drifting much faster, farther and farther away. It was a spar, a portion of the rigging, to which a man had lashed himself, and then trusted to the set of the tide and the direction of the wind to bear him from ship to shore. Towards the latter the spar was driven for two or three hundred yards in a fairly straight line, but then, just as Bart caught sight of it for the first time, a strong eddy turned it, and whirled it in a direction almost parallel with, instead of towards, the beach. It would still be blown on shore, but lower down the coast.

As powerless to help him as was the exhausted man lashed to the spar to help himself, Bart

watched him as the poor fellow was swirled rapidly away.

When he looked again at the wrecked schooner, a loud "Hurray !" burst from his heart and lips, for at last the boat had reached her ; she was alongside at last, and the first of the crew to be rescued were springing into her. He ran again indoors, and prepared his mother for the guests she might now expect so soon.

"Then where are you going ?" she inquired, as he rushed from her once more.

"A sailor lashed to a spar is being washed away along the lower beach, mother. I know the spot where he is almost certain to be driven ashore, and I'm going there to be ready to help him if he's still alive, and to bring him here. I didn't think of this at first, but now I have thought of it I'm off."

And "off" he was. Keeping at first to the cliff top, he eagerly scanned the rough sea below him, and descried the object he sought. The man on the spar had been carried now almost to the shore about a mile ahead. In the cold light of the dawn Bart saw the spar being hurled nearer and nearer to the beach with the onward rush of every wave. He clambered down, and ran on over the slippery sands as he had never run in his life. But before he reached the spot he was making for so quickly, a long-rolling billow threw up on the shore, "high," though *not* "dry," the sailor lashed to the spar.

The next instant Wrecker Mike, who had followed the spar ahead of Bart, shot from behind a sharp curve in the cliff line, and knelt by the side of the almost drowned and apparently unconscious sailor, from whose two ears—numbered and almost frozen—hung rings of solid gold. Failing to detach them otherwise, with hasty fingers Black tore these from his victim's still living flesh. Then he rapidly searched the sailor's body for any other articles of value that he might have about him.

But the sharp shock of the brutal wrenching off of his ear-rings had hastened the castaway's return to consciousness. His broad breast heaved with a sigh that ended in a shudder, and then his eyes opened.

"Where am I?" he murmured.

"Where you've no business to be," said Black savagely—"in the land of the living. I thought the sea 'ud throw you up dead—it shall next time, for drowned men tell no tales."

The sailor's senses were rapidly returning to him. He made a desperate effort to rise and throw the other off.

"You're robbing me," he cried. "And then you'd throw me in the sea again."

The next moment Black's fingers were round his throat, just as young Arber reached the spot.

"Hands off, you cowardly ruffian!"

Up sprang Wrecker Mike, facing the newcomer fiercely. Without a moment's delay they closed

with each other, and a sharp, though short, struggle commenced between them.

The boy soon found that he was no match for the man, though he stuck pluckily at him as long as he was able to stand on his feet. This was not for long. With a quick vigorous lunge Black flung his young antagonist from him. Bart reeled and fell. As he struggled to rise again, he saw that the sailor was striving to free himself from the lashings that bound him to the spar. This gave him an idea. Once more facing Black the moment he regained his feet, he contrived, by feint after feint, to draw him higher up the sands, and to keep him so busily at work pommeling himself that he could take no notice of the sailor.

Bart's dodge succeeded. It was not long before he was knocked down a second time.

"Hurrray!" he shouted with all the breath he had left.

"Seem to like it!" grinned Wrecker Mike.

Turning his eyes, he understood the true meaning of that shouted "Hurrray!" The sailor had freed himself, and was hurrying up with the evident intention of doing his share of the fighting.

Michael Black didn't wait for him. He took to his heels, and made off as fast as his legs would carry him.

For two or three hundred yards the sailor—himself followed closely by Bart—held on in pursuit. Then he pitched heavily forward on to his face.

Abandoning the chase of the runaway thief, Arber knelt beside the fallen sailor, and gently turned him to the light.

"Lend us your hand, youngster," said the stranger. Bart helped him to rise. He gave himself two or three vigorous shakes, pulled himself together, and stood up straight—a fine, big, broad, strong, deep-chested man of about thirty-five, of just the build, and with just the features, of a typical British seaman.

"Where's that warmint?" he demanded, gazing dizzily around him.

"Gone," replied Bart, even more shortly.

"With my gold earrings. Thought I was drowned, but I wasn't—only stunned by being throwed up on the beach so heavy. I'm a bit giddy yet, and should founder long afore we could overhaul the rascal now. Hulloo, sir—I beg your honor's pardon—he's knocked you about the bows considerable, and stove in your starb'd skylight. I'll catch him, and we'll share the killing of him between us fair." He said this with the air of a man who was generously offering to share something very good with a chum.

"Follow as close in my wake as you can," he added, as he started to take up the chase after Mike.

But he was evidently in no condition for the exertion. He would have fallen again before he had gone a dozen yards had not Bart managed to hold him up. He clapped his hand to his head.

"I'm too giddy," he confessed.

"We must let him go for the present," said the other firmly.

"I'm afraid there ain't no help for it," agreed the sailor reluctantly. "But look 'ee here, sir. I'm a wonderful peaceable man—extraordinary peaceable. Howsumdever, if ever I gets along-side that pirate I shan't be safe. Nor he won't be safe either. He was robbing the dead, as he thought. And I *should* ha' lost the number of my mess if you hadn't come flying up with the wind as you did, for he'd a-killed me first and then sent me adrift again. 'Drowned men tell no tales,' says he. I thank ye hearty, young master, for what you done—hearty and true. My name's Bob Simmons, sir—the peaceabelest man in the world, but I'd fight for you any day. I thank ye hearty. My hand on it, sir."

Bart shook his new friend's huge hand cordially. They had already turned, and would soon be in sight of Cliff House. But they had to take several long rests on the way, owing to the sailor's attacks of giddiness.

"Where are we making for?" inquired he.

"Home," said Bart. "To repair damages!" he added with a laugh.

"After you, sir," said Bob Simmons with quaint courtesy.

They found at Cliff House that the others of the rescued crew had been already taken there. Kind-hearted Mrs. Arber and old Biddy the

servant had done everything for the poor fellows that could possibly be done, and most of them had left again to help the fishermen bring from the schooner such movable effects as could be got ashore before she broke up. Now that wind and waves had subsided, this work was being carried on as rapidly as possible.

When Bob Simmons woke from the snoring sleep into which he fell after his hot bath and hot breakfast, his chest had (by Bart's instructions) been carried from the wreck into the house.

"Never thought to see it again," he remarked. "It's hearty welcome, for it holds all I've got in the world, and a letter what belongs to somebody else, as I've got to deliver *to* somebody hereabouts *from* somebody else."

He opened the chest, and proceeded to find the letter, but turned round to Mrs. Arber and her son, and went on :

"I don't properly belong to the coasting schooner what drove ashore last night. Till her present voyage I'd been sailing three years on the *Leo*, trading brig, Cap'n Christopher J. Caines, master and chief owner. Two months ago she fetched Bristol, to sail again for Bermuda as soon as one cargo was out and the other in. The day she cleared I shipped on the coaster for a change. I boarded the *Leo* to say good-by to the old man, for a better skipper—man and sailor—I never want to sail under."

“ ‘Where are ye bound for, Bob?’ says he.

“ ‘Yarmouth, sir,’ says I.

“ ‘Yarmouth?’ says Cap’n Caines very thoughtful.

“ ‘Yes, sir.’

“ ‘Bob, will ye take a letter there for me, and put it yourself in the hands of the gentleman I’ll address it to?’ he asks.

“ ‘Of course I will, your honor,’ I replies.

“Down he goes into his cabin, and up he comes in two shakes with the letter all wrote. He’s a wonderful scholar, ma’am.”

Bob dived his hand into the far corner of his chest and brought up a neatly-sealed letter. He held it from him, and gazed admiringly at the clear, firm pen-strokes of the name and address upon it.

“Wonderful writing,” he ejaculated. “I can read it myself! ‘Mr. William Arber, Cliff House, by Yarmouth.’”

Bart sprang to his feet. His mother sank back in her chair.

“My husband!” cried one.

“Father!” cried the other.

“Is it for . . . ?” began Bob.

“For my husband? Yes—for me,” said Mrs. Arber.

With trembling hands she took the letter and broke the seal. Then she faltered.

“Read it, Bart,” she said. “I cannot—my eyes are swimming so. Read it.”

Very quietly Bob Simmons turned and left the room.

The boy took and read aloud the short, plain, seaman-like letter of Captain Christopher Caines.

“On board the brig ‘Leo,’

BRISTOL, Nov, 1st, 1807.

TO MR. WILLIAM ARBER,

CLIFF HOUSE, BY YARMOUTH.

DEAR WILLIAM,

When we last met you insisted on giving me the enclosed memorandum. Except for the present occasion I have been only once in England since. Knowing well that you will take the first opportunity you have of carrying out your threat of repaying me, I wish in the meantime to return you your memorandum. In the present times of war we afloat are exposed to special perils. In a word, I wish you to feel in case of my death that there is not amongst my papers anything on which my executors could trouble you or—especially—your wife after you. I have often been near to destroying the paper. But if your wife sees you do it yourself her mind will be more completely at ease about the matter, in the event of anything happening to you as well as to your old friend and very sincere well-wisher.

“CHRIS. J. CAINES.”

The letter dropped from Bart’s hands. Eagerly, but in silence, he read the inclosure.

"I. O. U. £500 (five hundred pounds) Br. sterling.

(Signed) WILLIAM ARBER."

Mr. Christopher J. Caines.

"The inclosure—where is it?—what do you hold in your hands?" asked Mrs. Arber faintly.

"THE FIRST CLUE, mother!" replied Bart.

CHAPTER V.

OFF ON A FAR SEARCH.

TIRED though they both were, Bart and Mrs. Arber sat up far into that night together in earnest conversation, the former pleading for his mother's consent to the plans upon which he had set his heart. That consent was given at first with tears and many misgivings, but finally her son's enthusiasm and hopefulness—the bright and confident hopefulness of “pluck”—overflowed, so to speak, from his heart into hers, hitherto so sad and desponding.

“Long and dangerous as the journey must be,” she reflected, “he will be seventeen next birthday, and he is strong and healthy and self-reliant.”

As regarded her husband's release, it was certain that his innocence must first be proved. Undoubtedly, the first link in the chain of proof was now in their hands ; the other links, under all the circumstances, could be best, if not only, supplied by the expatriated one himself.

She had written to him, he never to her ; though that he was alive she had only recently received official information.

He could not come to them, he would not write : the mystery surrounding his fate could, like the mystery of his silence, be only solved in one way. Her son was right—let Bart go to him.

When should he start ?

As to this, only one deterrent thought disturbed the boy. His mother had been ill—if to leave her now was to increase any risk of losing her, he would wait. Not even to find his father would he lose his mother. But on this point she herself reassured him.

“Already,” she cried, “I am better. Already the idea of action has nerved and braced me. I feel that the dark cloud over your life and mine—and *his*—may after all be lifted. You shall start as soon as we can make the necessary arrangements. As to the cost and length of your voyage, and as to the best means of reaching Port Jackson . . .”

“I’ll ask Bob Simmons,” put in Bart, with a sudden inspiration. “In the course of his wanderings he has very likely been there. I’ll ask him in the morning.”

“Before then, and before we ask any help from any one else, we will ask God’s blessing and *His* help.”

Silently they knelt together, while the wife and mother prayed that his Heavenly Father would lead her son safely to the side of his earthly father. She prayed that in all his journeyings, in all perils on land and sea, he might be guarded

and protected. And she prayed that the Heavenly Judge would enable them to prove the innocence of their dear one, and to rescue him from the doom to which his earthly judge had condemned him.

Bart's first inquiry next morning was for Simmons, whom he had constrained to stay at Cliff House over the night, and to whom, as the phrase goes, he had "taken a violent fancy." It was still very early, but the worthy Bob had been out some time.

"Which he had some breakfast," explained Biddy, "left his humble respects, and would report hisself later on."

He returned about the middle of the day.

"Why, Bob," said Bart, "where have you been all the morning?"

"Well," replied Bob, rather confusedly and a little shamefacedly, "I'm a wonderful peaceable man, as I've told ye, but the fact is, I've been looking for that there piratical robber, Mike Black."

"Without finding him?"

"Yes. He's been seen nowhere nigh the place since yesterday morning. There's no manner o' doubt but that he's cleared off, and he's likely to give the neighborhood a wide berth for long enough now."

"Perhaps he felt uneasy about meeting you—didn't understand what a wonderfully peaceable man you are."

"He'd ha' knowed more about me if he'd stopped till I'd caught him."

"Have you ever been to Australia, Bob?"

"Yes, sir—two voyages."

Bart plied him with a number of questions, almost all of which he was able to answer.

With a rising color and slightly altered voice, Bart said at last :

"The Penal Settlements—at least, I mean where the conv—where the prisoners go—do you know Botany Bay?"

To his astonishment the sailor received this query with evident uneasiness. He looked down, he looked aside—he looked anywhere but at his questioner.

"Yes. Botany Bay it's called, Port Jackson it *is*—the place you mean. I've been there."

"If you wanted to go there again—to Port Jackson—which port would you look for a ship in?"

"Port o' London, sir, undoubted."

The questioning was renewed on a number of other days, for Simmons, on leaving Cliff House, had taken up his quarters at Yarmouth, and generally happened to be "standing by" ready for a chat whenever Bart wanted to find him. He seemed in no hurry to go to sea again.

At home, preparations were being made for the long voyage to the antipodes. But Christmas approached before they were completed. As the day of his departure drew nearer and nearer,

Bart spent more and more of his time with his mother. He did not like to leave her now, even for an hour. He was so glad to think that they would be together on Christmas Day—though they must part so soon afterwards.

At last the morning came. I do not like to write much about that parting between mother and son. Don't most of you boys know what it is to "say good-by to mother," though you are only going from her till the end of the term? Don't we other boys we, older boys, with bearded faces and whitening hair, know what it was to "say good-by to mother," though we could almost hear the Angels opening the gates?

Bart was to proceed by coach to London, there to find a ship and take passage. When he arrived at the hotel from which the coach started, his mother's last kisses were warm, and her tears still wet, upon his face; her last words were still ringing in his ears and in his heart.

The guard had mounted behind, the horses were fretting in their yokes, the coachman was on his box. Bart clambered up to his seat beside him. The remaining front seat on that side remained vacant.

"Ted," cried the driver, "where's the houtside horfside box?"

"Not turned hup," replied the guard. "We're overdue—can't wait a minute longer."

"No. Give 'em their 'eads, lads!"

The men sprang back from the leaders' heads.

The coachman cracked his long whip, the guard blew a merry blast. The wheels were already turning when the missing passenger ran rapidly, but coolly, across the road. With an easy spring he cleared the spinning spokes, and swung himself into his seat.

"All right," he remarked quietly. "Traps is on board. Let her rip."

It was Bob Simmons, whom Bart had not seen lately.

"Why, Bob!"

"Good-morning, Master Bart," said Bob, touching his cap.

But this greeting was followed by a hand-shake as hearty on one side as the other.

"Are you going to London too, Bob?"

"Yes—if you are."

"I am going a good deal farther than that," said Bart sadly.

"So am I," rejoined the salt.

Then he lowered his head till his lips were level with the other's ear, and in a low, flurried voice went on :

"Look'ee here, Master Bart, I want to get this job over. First, I begs your pardon for knowing summat. I knowed summat the very morning you first asked me about the country and the place you're bound for, for them fisher chaps had told me summat. Biddy's free jaw tackle paid out the rest—she told me whether I would or whether I wouldn't. And let me tell you, sir,

there's others as believes him innocent besides you. Master Bart, you'll be having money about you. There's them in London as might steal it—but not with a peaceable man like me alongside you. I'm coming to London with you. And same as I'm coming to London along o' you now aboard this coach, I'm going along o' you aboard the same ship to New South Wales, though you'll be a passenger and me before the mast. There'll be perils afloat and perils on land t'other side, and a peaceable man alongside as knows the ropes may come in handy. Master Bart, one part of the world's the same to me as any other part. I'm coming with you ! And I begs your pardon for knowing."

Bart couldn't speak. His mouth was too full—for his heart was in it. Beneath the tarpaulin that covered their knees the two comrades grasped hands.

The delicacy of feeling of this rough honest fellow touched Bart to the very quick. He "begged his pardon for knowing something." How he had shrunk from inflicting upon another the pain that other might experience in realizing that his secret was not all his own. Bart understood now why this big-hearted friend of his had stammered and hesitated when he had first questioned him about the place with that ominous name of Botany Bay.

"Bob Simmons," he said very quietly, "what do you call yourself ?"

“ A able-bodied seaman.”

“ I call you something else.”

“ What’s that ? ”

“ A gentleman.”

CHAPTER VI.

BOB SIMMONS'S LOVE-STORY.

"TELL you about my two previous voyages to Australia?" said Bob Simmons as the coach bowled along. "Cert'n'ly—only I don't know as there's anything very particular to tell. I went there the first time aboard o' the *Boomerang*—full-rigged ship, fast, but given to roll in heavy weather."

He proceeded to spin a racy yarn about the voyage. In the course of it he gave a lively description of life in Australia, and of different parts of the country itself. Bart listened with eager interest—an interest which was by no means easily satisfied, for Bob no sooner showed signs of "drying up" than he asked :

"What about your second voyage?"

"Well," said Bob slowly, "it was not so much a ship as took me there the second time as love."

"Love! Love took you to Australia?"

"Yes, Master Bart," was the solemn reply—"Love. Not exactly the same sort o' love as is taking you there now, but love all the same. I was in love."

“Oh, well, of course being in love is such a private sort of matter that I mustn't ask . . .”

“Bless your heart! you're welcome to know all about it, the first chance I get of telling you quietly. I can't tell you now because the coachman's a-listening. But I daresay there'll be a chance before we fetch London, if you'd really like to hear the yarn.”

“I should like to hear it very much,” said Bart; “so I hope there will be a chance.”

The chance came, and Bob availed himself of it. The story he told gave Bart, as it will give us, a further insight into the character of its narrator and hero.

Certain portions were told with a pathos and a simple eloquence that Bart was not prepared for.

“Love's a very peculiar sort of thing, sir” (began Bob Simmons). “In my opinion, there ain't nothing as throws a man on his beam ends—nothing as blows out his rigging and shifts his ballast—like being in love. Now in every love story as I ever heard, there's always a woman mixed up. Generally speaking, it's a young woman and unearthly beautiful and unearthly good, till about ten days after the weddin'. Its a very strange thing, but there's nothing changes a woman's looks and her general sailing like the wedding ceremony. Ask any married man you know. As usual, there's a young woman mixed up in this yarn I'm going for to spin. I'd better

start from the first beginning of it, all fair and ship-shape.

“At the time I’m a-going to talk about, I’d just been paid off o’ the poor old *Ocean Belle*, who went to pieces a year or two afterwards on a coral reef in the Pacific. I landed in London after a good long cruise, with my heart full of spirits and my pockets full of money. I stayed long enough to get rid of some of the money ; and then as it was nigh on to Christmas-time, and having nobody else to pay a visit to, I decided to run up to Whitby to spend Christmas with an old uncle and aunt I’d got living there.

“According, I fetched Whitby one cold, dark night after a heavy passage. The old folks was particular glad to see me, and got up a party a few days before Christmas for to celebrate my visit.

“This party was where it all begun. As soon as I tacked into the room where the company was anchored, I see a pretty little brown-eyed, brown-haired lass sitting very quiet and thoughtful near the fire ; and near her, eyeing her in a way as I didn’t like the look of, was a young linendraper chap with long hair and the name of Faggles, as served in a shop in the town. The little brown-eyed lass I never see before ; but I knowed Faggles, as were a lubber who put worses into the town paper fit to sink a whole fleet with fright.

“‘Bob,’ says my old aunt, taking hold of the lass’s hand, ‘this is Rosie Deane—my wild young nephew, Bob Simmons.’

"Seeing as that poetical lubber's eyes was on me, I draws my left foot back, and makes a bow as perlite as a dancing master, and then I takes a chair between Rosie and Faggles as we slewed up to the table ; and I tries to look easy though red.

" 'You have just returned from sea, Mr. Simmons ?' says Rosie—and I shall never forget how sweet and soft and gentle her voice was.

" 'Yes,' I says, bashful, and then I turns round to Faggles, and says, 'Any new pomes out lately ?'

" 'No,' says the linendraper, 'not lately. My last hode,' he says with a mournful smile, 'has been too much for me.' And he stretches out his hand for another crumpet.

" 'I think, mate,' I says friendly, for I knowed I didn't ought to have no grudge agin him, 'I think you eat too much. That's what it is. Leastways, I've always heard as food was a very bad thing for gennelmen afflicted your way.'

" 'I didn't mean no offense, but the observation were took amiss, and I thought there'd ha' been a bit of a squall ; and as for Rosie Deane, I thought she'd ha' died through trying to stop laughing. But it blowed over by her a-asking of me to tell about my voyage.

" 'I was too nervous like to say much then, but later on in the evening I got more at home with her ; and she listened, with her sweet brown eyes glistening and wondering, and her bonnie face lit up with light, while I told her about the great

wonderful sea, and all the strange lands and strange people I'd seen.

"Her shy brown eyes was raised to mine, and her little hand rested in mine a moment, as we said good-by that night. And many and many a time since then—far, far away—I've seemed to see them dear brown eyes again as they looked into mine that night. And I've felt the resting of that little hand in mine—them little white fingers in my strong and horny grasp, in many a peril, in many a deadly danger, since that time when I first said to her 'good-by, good-night!'

"The next morning, as I was a-beating about like, I found myself drifted close to the farmhouse where Rosie's father and mother lived. Her father come out, and the end of it was I found myself setting down inside, smoking a pipe with him. The next day was the same, and the next. The wind always blowed towards Dingle Farm. Old Deane was a nice sort of fellow, though hasty and very hot-tempered.

"Now I found during these here visits that Rosie was very fond of music; and according, I sailed on to a splendid idea. I'd read in a good many love tales about different lubbers serenadin' their young women, and I made up my mind as when Christmas Eve came round I'd make a quiet run out to Dingle Farm, and do a reg'lar ship-shape proper serenade under Rosie's berth—least-ways window. The difficulty was, I knowed I'd never played anything but the Jew's-harp and the

drum, and somehow they didn't seem quite the things for to run a serenade with, though the Jew's harp is pleasing, and the drum cert'nly is a rousing instrument. I thought I might just squeeze through with a concertina, but I knowed I was very shaky on the top notes.

"These reflections took me aback for a bit, but I soon got under weigh with a good notion. I went to a music shop to see what they could do for me, and I come across a small barril-horgan, easy enough to carry. 'The very thing!' I says to myself.

" 'Mate,' says I to the shopman, 'does this play sekerler or sacred toones?'

" 'Both, sir,' he says. 'The fact is, it belonged to a strange old gennelman here, who had it made for him. It got a bit out of order, and he brought it here in a pet, and told us to sell it. You've only to handle it this way,' he says, fumbling about the stops, 'and the toones soon get in proper order. Here it goes, just when I set it off.'

"Sure enough out busts the barril-horgan, playing beautiful ' 'Ark! the 'Erild Hangels sing.'

"When I heard that, 'Name your price!' I hollers, for a more lovely toone to go a-serenadin' with on a Christmas Eve I felt I couldn't have.

"The next night was Christmas Eve. I was very nervous all day long; but when the night come, off I started with the barril-horgan for Dingle Farm.

"It was very dark, and I lost my bearings once

or twice, but about eleven o'clock I brought up near the farm. I went along very quiet, with the barril-horgan under my arm, till I got about a quarter of a knot from the house.

"All of a sudden I heard some lubber walking behind me. I didn't take no notice, nor I didn't hail him. But he seemed to foller close in my wake, and when I starb'd'd my hel'm and turned into the lane leading up to the house, he starb'd'd his hel'm almost at the same time, and ran his head down the lane. Then I broached to and lay by close in to the hedge.

"It was Faggles the poet, with a trumpet big enough to float a ship in.

" 'Faggles !' I says.

" 'Simmons !' says he.

" 'Faggles !' I hollers.

" 'Simmons !' shouts he.

" 'Yes,' I makes answer and says, 'Simmons it is.'

" 'Yes,' he says, 'Faggles it is.'

" 'With a Jericho trumpet ?' says I.

" 'With a cornet-ar-piston,' he replies, lofty. 'Simmons, with a beer-barrel under his arm ?'

" 'With a little barril-horgan,' I says haughty.

"I knowed what he'd come for, and I knowed he knowed what I'd come for. We was both running in the serenadin' line.

" 'I thought matters would come to a krikis between us before long,' says Faggles.

" 'And now it's come,' I says. 'And a neat

little thing in the way of krikisses it is. As neat a little krikis as ever I see. Come on,' I says, putting down the barril-horgan and taking off my coat. 'I'm a peaceable man,' I says; 'but come on, and I'll give you a krikis on the nose. Come on!'

"But Faggles had got under weigh, all canvas spread, and by the time I bore down on him, we was close under the windows of Dingle Farm.

"All was very quiet and still and dark. I takes up a position near the water-butt, and Faggles stands close to the wall, the other side of the window.

"I fixes my little barril-horgan, and Faggles raises his trumpet to his mouth.

"'Faggles,' I says, 'will you go away?'

"'No,' he says, 'I'm *blowed* if I do!'

"'Then, Faggles,' says I, 'we'll each take a hinderpendent course till later on; only,' I says, solemn, 'only, Faggles, remember this—your blood, Faggles, be on your own head!'

"I touched the spring for 'Ark! the 'Erild Hangels sing.' Out busts that plaguey horgan, rattling and roaring and crashing, 'We won't go home till morning!' at the very instant that a awful blast come from Faggles' trumpet, a-playing, 'My lady sleeps,' in a minor key.

"The result was awful. Four dogs flew at us, barking like mad—other dogs took up the alarm—Faggles kept on a-blowing—the horgan went on with 'We won't go home till morning!' I was

hollering at the dogs—Bedlam seemed to be let loose—and in the middle of it all old Deane threw up the window, and looked out, with a gun in his hand ; Mrs. Deane standing at 'is elbow.

“ ‘My dear,’ he says, ‘fire I will. It’s no use to tell me it’s cats. I know cats don’t go home till morning, but they don’t play bands about it.’ And up went the gun to his shoulder.

“ ‘Life is sweet. I made one plunge for the water-butt, and in I jumped. Faggles dashed his trumpet to the ground, and got into a dog’s-kennel.

“ ‘Speak at once,’ hollers the old man, ‘whoever you are, or I’ll fire?’”

“ ‘Mr. Deane,’ hollers Faggles from the kennel, it ‘isn’t me. It’s theseafaring gennelman in the water-butt.’

“ ‘Water-butt?’ says old Deane.

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ I says, getting out. “ ‘Bring me a spade, sir, so’s I can bury this infernal horgan, for I can’t stop it—and then I’ll explain everything.’”

“ ‘Down came the farmer, and in went me and Faggles, excepting what the dogs had bit out of us, leaving the horgan still a-playing. Things was explained as well as they could be, and all was forgiven on the condition that nothing of the sort should ever occur again, and that me and Faggles should shake hands.

“ ‘As we walked back together that night, Faggles says, ‘I shan’t go no more where my lady

sleeps, unless I know the dogs is not only sleeping too, but chained up.'

"And says I, very mournful, "Faggles, no more of the 'Erild Hangels for me. There's too much of the water-butt about 'em."

"The next morning—Christmas morning—I see Rosie at church, and spoke to her coming out. I see her in church, kneeling and praying all peaceful and calm, with the light from the painted window falling on her glossy head and folded hands.

"I heard her dear sweet voice joining in hymn and litany. I spoke to her coming out, and held her hand in mine again as I wished her a merry Christmas. And I longed to throw my arms around her, and draw her close, close to the rough heart that loved her so dear.

"That night—that Christmas night—I told her how dear she was to me. I'd spent the evening at Dingle Farm, and she'd come to the door to see me off. The moon and stars was shining very bright and very peaceful over all the quiet woods and fields and hills.

"I took in mine the little hand that would ha' been so mighty to guide my life; and as simple and manly as I could I told her just the plain story of how very dear I loved her, and I only asked her was there any hope?

"Oh, so pale grew her face! Her hand trembled—trembled like a shivering ship—as she tried to withdraw it from my grasp.

“ ‘Oh, no, no—I’m so sorry—I’m so sorry !’

“ ‘I kept back all the feelings that rose like a mighty flood in my heart—and I only asked her, ‘My dear, there is some one else you love?’

“ ‘And low and soft she whispered ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Rosie?’

“ ‘Yes?’

“ ‘It . . . it . . . it isn’t the gennelman what blowed the trumpet last night, is it?’

“ ‘Oh, no, no, no !’

“ ‘And then, with the moonlight falling sweetly and brightly and softly on her dear brown curls, she laid her little head on the rough sleeve of my coat, and cried as though her heart would break. I laid my hard, strong hand on her little, bowed, troubled head ; and for the first time for many a long year I found a prayer a-going up from my heart—that I might be able to help my darling in her sorrow, for nothing now could be half so sweet to me as to do that.

“ ‘ ‘Rosie,’ I says, husky, but very firm, ‘I’m only a rough sailor, and I’ve knowed all along as I could never be worthy to join company along of you. I’m only a rough sort of a fellow, but I’ll do my duty—I’ll stand by to help you, my dear, whilst I’ve got a rag flying. I love you so dear that I want you to trust me, and let me try to help you. I ain’t got no other thought in my heart now but to help you, God knows. And if there’s aught wrong between you and . . . and . . . and the man you loves, I’ll try to help you,

Rosie, if you'll let me. I will, my dear . . . because I do love you so very tender and true, that . . . I . . . only want to see you happy.'

"And by and by she told me how she'd sent away from her a man who loved her—sent him away long ago because she thought she didn't care for him, and how when he'd gone away, no one knew where, somewhere across the blue waters, she found, too late, that all her heart had turned to him, all her heart was his, all her heart was pain within her till he could come to claim it.

"This was my poor girl's secret, and no brother and no sister had she to share it with. And like as a brother might ha' done, I raised her hand to my lips and kissed it—kissed it, only once in all my life—kissed it slow and loving and gentle, as I said to myself, 'I will find him if I roam the wide world over.'

"And before I left her—never to see her again, never, never to see her no more—the name of the man she loved, and every line of his face—for she carried his likeness in her breast—was written in my heart."

* * * * *

"I found him at last. Far away from home, far away from the girl who loved him, I found him.

"And he come back to her, back across the waters, back to the light of Rosie's bonny brown eyes, back to the joy of calling her wife, and her children sons and daughters, back to the tender

arms and gentle heart of the girl who loved him.

“He was lying sick and weak and helpless in a shepherd’s hut out in Australia. As I see him for the first time, and bent over the rough bed on which he was lying, his mind was wandering far away. He was muttering the name that was so dear to both of us, holding out longing hands for her in his fever and pain and loneliness. I watched by him day and night, and always he called her name, always he held out his thin worn hands in longing to draw her to him. Of the English fields and lanes and trees and flowers he used to talk sometimes—but only as though she was walking with him there. Of the moonlight upon the waters and white beach near Rosie’s home—but only as though she was standing by his side. Of the old dim church, the church where I saw her kneeling that Christmas morning, with its painted windows and old carved pews—but always as though she was kneeling by his side. Of the farmhouse where me and poor Faggles went serenadin’—but only as though she was waiting for him there.

“At last there come a night when he could hear and understand.

“And I told him all.

“I couldn’t help it—I couldn’t help him knowing as I loved her too, so dear and so deathless, and how I’d been searching for him for to send him back to her, so’s she could be happy. And

the names he called me is unfit for to be repeated.

“The sudden Australian sunrise broke in upon us—and I remembered it was the sunrise of another Christmas day.

“‘Mate,’ I says, ‘it’s Christmas morning—God bless ye ! It’s Christmas morning, and soon it’ll be Christmas in dear old England ; and the bells will be ringing out, and the people will be gathering in church. And she’ll be there, and she’ll be praying for you, mate, and maybe she’ll even be putting in a word for me. Prayers ain’t so much in my line,’ I says, ‘as they ought to be ; but give us your hand, mate ; *let’s think of a bit of a prayer for Rosie !*’

“After that I got thinking somehow about ‘Erild Hangels, and I couldn’t help wondering whether that unfort’nate barril-horgan had stopped yet.”

CHAPTER VII.

“ SPARROWS ” FOR THE “ HAWK.”

AFTER a substantial breakfast the next morning, in London, the two friends discussed their plans for the day.

“This is how I think we should lay out our course,” said Bob. “You want to pay a visit to Snaresbrook, and we both want to find a ship. Now you don’t want my convoy to Snaresbrook and back, and I don’t want your convoy to the docks. The ship’s in my department. We can both sail independent. You make for Snaresbrook, I’ll head for the docks; and we can meet at this hotel here again to-night. What name did you call it by?”

“The ‘Three Nuns,’ Aldgate.”

“Thank’ee. Very well, then, what d’ye say if we agree to rejoin company here at eight to-night?”

“That will do capitally,” said Bart.

Away walked Bob Simmons to look for a ship and away drove Bart Arber for Snaresbrook in a hackney-coach.

He told Doctor Barfield everything that had

occurred since he was "called home" from the school. His old master was intensely interested in the project upon which his ex-pupil had embarked, and warmly wished him a safe voyage, and all success in the great object upon the accomplishment of which his hopes were now all centered. He bade him write before he sailed, and then again from time to time.

"By-the-by," he remarked, "one of your schoolfellows has gone to sea since you left us—or is to go if he has not already sailed."

"Indeed, sir! Who is he?"

"Peter Rudge, from Norwich."

"Peter Rudge!"

"Yes. The fact is, I had reasons for asking his mother to remove him. Then, as he would not, according to what I am told, either settle down to any quiet pursuit or resume his studies, an appointment was procured for him as midshipman on board one of the King's ships."

"Well," thought Bart, "with Peter in the Royal Navy, and myself off to Australia, I wonder when and where we shall ever meet to finish that fight!"

"What luck, Bob?" was his first question when the pair of adventurers met in the evening. "Have you found a ship?"

"Well sir," said Bob Simmons slowly, "I've found a barque outward bound this week for Port Jackson. If the circumstances had been proper-wise she'd ha' been the very ship for us, but the

circumstances being contrary-wise it follows sort of consequential that she ain't the ship for us.”

“ Why not ? What do you mean by ‘ contrary-wise ? ’ What’s the matter with the ship ? ”

“ Nothing, Master Bart. A finer barque than the *Blue-bell* never sailed the seas. D’ye remember my yarn about my second voyage to Australia ? ”

“ Of course I do, Bob.”

“ Well, ’twas aboard the *Blue-bell* I shipped for the passage out, and she was the fust ship I clapped my peepers on when I fetched the docks this morning. Up the gangway I goes, and asks for the cap’en, who turned out to be my old commander, Mr. Swift, who had the barque when I sailed aboard her before. He received me hearty, and hauled me down to his own cabin. ’Soon as I asked if he wanted a hand he pricks up his ears. To cut it short, Master Bart, he offered to take me there and then as bo’sun.”

“ Bravo ! ”

“ Bravo so far, but not no farther. He’s willing enough to take me, but when I spoke for a passenger’s berth for you, he put his foot down. ‘ I’m carrying more passengers already than I’ve got accommodation for, says he ; ‘ besides which my wife is coming with me this voyage. I won’t take another passenger for love or for money, he says, and nothing I could put in would move him. ‘ Bring me a few sailor-men, Bob,’ say Cap’en Swift, ‘ and a smart boy or two, for at present

my crew's not half-made, but no passenger whatever he'd pay.' "

For a little while Bart said nothing, but his thoughts were busy,

"Bob," he said at length, quietly but earnestly, "we'll both sail this week on board the *Blue-bell*."

"It can't be done," rejoined Bob Simmons sorrowfully. "I wish it could, for we shan't find another ship in a hurry, I'm afraid."

"Quite so. But it can be done. Captain Swift has offered to take you as bo'-sun, so *you're* all right. He won't take me as passenger, so in that respect *I'm* all wrong. But he said he wanted a boy on board—a ship's boy, a cabin boy; I don't know what sort of a boy, but a boy of some sort. I think you even said one or two boys. Now I'm a boy of some sort. Get him to take me, not as a passenger but as a paid hand, and then *I'm* all right too."

Bob was considerably taken aback by this proposal, against which he urged a number of objections. Bart overruled them all.

"I shall get there just as soon before the mast as behind it," he insisted, "and my mother's purse will be saved a pretty heavy pull upon it."

In the end his insistance prevailed. Very early the next morning Bob took him on board the barque and introduced him to Captain Swift, upon whom their united representations had the desired effect. Before he left the cabin, Bart was an engaged member of the crew.

“Now then,” he said gaily, “about my outfit. I’ve plenty of cash on me to buy one at once—and also to get you, Bob, anything you require. After that I must go into the city to present a letter from my mother to a firm of bankers there who will advance me a further sum if necessary, and also give me a letter of credit for use on the other side of the world.”

Under Bob Simmons’s experienced guidance a capital outfit for the embryo sailor (or “sucking Jack Tar” as Bob laughingly called him) was purchased forthwith and despatched to the hotel. Then the two “shipmates” parted—the bo’sun to proceed on board, where he was already anxious to get on with a number of duties, and the lad to attend to his business in the city. They arranged to meet at the hotel at the same hour as on the previous evening.

“It’ll be your last night ashore,” said Bob ; for to-morrow we’ll send our traps aboard and join the ship.”

To beguile the time Bart proceeded to array himself for the first time in his complete rig-out as a sailor-boy on shore.

“The sooner I get used to the feel of such strange clothes the better,” he said to himself.

He had bought himself altogether several suits, but naturally enough only put on now the best-looking.

Bart was back at the “Three Nuns” before eight

o'clock, and at once inquired for Bob Simmons. He had not returned. Eight o'clock came—but no Bob. Half-past eight—nine o'clock. Still no Bob. At last Bart's appetite overcame his politeness and his instincts of sociability, and (sitting down in his uniform, much to the astonishment of the waiter) he consumed in solitary state the meal he had hoped to share with his fellow traveler. Then he wrote a long and loving letter to his mother, telling her everything.

When ten o'clock struck and found him still alone he began to feel uneasy. Leaving a message for his absent friend in case the latter should return during his own absence, he sallied out with a vague hope of meeting him returning from the docks where, he rightly conjectured, he must have been detained. He soon lost his way. The farther he went the darker and dirtier was the narrow thoroughfare into which he had strayed. Just as he was turning to retrace his steps, he noticed a light a few hundred yards ahead.

"I'll see what the time is now," he thought, and walked on towards the light, which he found to proceed from a still open shop, crammed with a miscellaneous stock of reefers, sou'-westers. sea-boots, and other articles.

Just as he was consulting his time-piece, the proprietor of the establishment appeared at his doorway.

"Come in," he said—"come in straight away. You've come to the right shop. You ain't made

no mistake. Some 'on 'em would swindle you—swindle you frightfully, my dear. But no fear of that with honest Moses. Here you are. Come in. Pick your own goods and pay your own price."

"I don't want anything, thank you," said Bart, turning.

"Oh, yes, you do," insisted "honest Moses," eyeing him over. "You wouldn't be walking down here towards the river unless you wanted to buy something. Whatever you want, my dear, here's the shop for it. Nobody ever leaves the docks, or goes to 'em, without stopping here to buy something from honest Moses."

"How far off are the docks?" asked Bart.

"Do you want to go there?" said the Jew, responding to one question by asking another.

"No, but I have been waiting the return of a friend who went there this morning."

Moses eyed him still more keenly, and stepped on to the pathway beside him as he asked,

"Was he a sailor?"

"Yes."

"Looking for a ship? If he wanted a good ship, he should have come to my shop for it. But I think I can give you news. What was his name?"

"Simmons—Bob Simmons," replied Bart eagerly,

"Simmons! Bob Simmons! Goodness gracious me! What a wonderful thing. It's all

right. I told you you wanted something. This is the shop for Bob Simmons. Come right in."

He bundled the half unwilling Bart into the shop, and threw open the door of a room behind it.

"Come straight through. Only think of it—*Bob Simmons!* Sit down by the fire."

Bart hesitated.

"Down by the fire, I tell you."

"What is it you have to say? What is there you can tell me about my friend?"

"Good news—all good news. Just keep your seat by that nice fire while I call *my* friend. He's only up the next alley. My friend has seen your friend, so we're all friends. This is the very shop for friends."

Moses ran to the front door and gave a peculiar whistle. Bart—now suspicious, and troubled with serious misgivings—rose to follow him out. But Moses's friend had already answered the Jew's call, and stood with him in the front doorway.

"Only one," whispered Moses, "but a likely lad. Straight through there he is. But first I'll tell you what card to play."

The other listened, and then glanced uncertainly at Bart through the glass panels of the inner door.

"It's risky," he said, "but I'll chance it."

The Jew slipped a capacious oilskin from a peg, and his friend had it over him in a twinkling.

"Quite right, Moses. Always like to do the job quietly when I can."

“Here he is. Here’s my friend. He’ll soon give you Bob Simmons!” cried Moses, flinging open the inner door.

There could be no possible doubt about the calling of the man who entered the room at the heels of “honest Moses”—“*s-a-i-l-o-r*, SAILOR,” was written all over him. This in some degree reassured our hero.

“Have you really any news for me?” he asked.

“Of your mate? Yes. If you want Bob Simmons come along o’ me.”

“Where is he?”

For a moment, the other was nonplused. Then he tried a random shot.

“Gone aboard.”

Instantly perceiving that he had not made a mistake—that the man of whom he spoke *might* have “gone aboard”—he added with a confident air,

“The ship is to sail sooner than he expected, and he can’t come ashore. If you want him, come along quietly—I mean quickly.”

“Do you know then where the *Blue-bell* is lying?”

“I belong to her, mate.”

“Then I’ll come with you at once,” said Bart.

Had he only seen the leer on the villainous face of the Jew behind him!

Quitting the shop, Bart and his guide made their way in silence to the waterside, the latter threading through the labyrinth of dark and dirty

lanes and alleys with an ease that proved his acquaintance with them. Once some men signaled him—he replied to the signal and they retreated into the shadow from which they had emerged.

“Shipmates of mine,” explained the stranger laconically. “Here we are. Down these steps—I’ve got a boat waiting at the bottom of ’em.”

Bart followed down the greasy, slimy stairway. A lantern in the bows showed the position of the boat. The sailor at Bart’s heels gave a whistle—the light was instantly covered.

“In you get, my hearty, no time to lose.”

Bart felt a push behind. The next moment he tumbled into the stern of the boat, where the sailor also instantly seated himself.

“Shove off.”

The boat shot out into the stream.

“Give way, my lads.”

The tide was evidently ebbing, for the craft made rapid way down the dark, silent river, rowed by its banks of sturdy oarsmen.

All this time Bart had had little opportunity for reflection—everything had happened so quickly, from the moment when the Jew appeared and accosted him until now. In fact, he had been bewildered. But as the boat glided swiftly on—past the grim Tower of London, whose walls and battlements looked only, in the darkness, like blacker shadows than those which hid the banks and brooded over the water, past the docks and

into the Pool, suspicions of something being wrong—thoughts even of foul play—began to take definite shape in his mind.

His uneasiness increased when, in reply to his questionings, he was roughly ordered to hold his tongue.

For a time he was silent. He could do nothing now, he reflected, but to go through with the adventure. But at last he could not refrain from demanding,

“ Where is the *Blue-bell* ? Why have we come so far down the river ? ”

“ The ship we want I’m just going to hail,” was the reply.

The speaker’s hail was immediately answered from a vessel of which Bart could only make out the dim outlines. In a moment the boat ran alongside.

“ Now, my lad, up with you ; and look smart.”

Young Arber knew that to draw back now would be worse than useless. Besides, everything might be all right ; this might be the *Blue-bell*, and Bob might be aboard. Up he clambered, and stood on the deck. His captors followed, immediately reporting themselves to the officer on duty.

One glance around was sufficient. Even Bart’s inexperienced eyes could see that this ship was no peaceful merchantman.

He turned furiously round on the man who had decoyed him on board.

"Where have you brought me?" he cried.

"Aboard of His Britannic Majesty's sloop-of-war *Hawk*, outward bound with the tide. That is, all being well. The captain's aboard."

As the fellow spoke the dip of approaching oars was heard; then the usual challenge came from the sentry forward.

"What boat's that?"

"Aye, aye."

"Officers coming alongside," reported the sentry.

The gangway was instantly manned, and two officers of the *Hawk* stepped up it to the deck.

"You cannot press me," Bart insisted; "take me to the captain, or let me speak to those officers."

He was forced back, and the two lieutenants disappeared below.

The sailor who had brought him on board took him by the arm.

"Come for'rud," he said, "and let me talk to you. I'm bo'-sun of this ship, and my name's Ned Cross. Them two officers just gone below are the fust and third loo-tenants. With them aboard now from Greenwich way, we're only waiting for my mates you saw me signaling as we come along from that crimp Moses's. When they're back—whether they've caught another sparrow for the *Hawk*, or several birds, or no bird at all—we shall sail with the tide, however short-handed we may be, for we're on urgent service. Now don't talk about being pressed. Let's say you

ain't pressed—you wolunteers. Becos whether you're pressed or whether you wolunteers, it don't make no sort o' difference in one way o' speaking—you sails with us all the same."

"You cannot take me," rejoined Bart excitedly. "You dare not. I'm not a seaman—I've never been to sea in my life."

"What you don't know we shall have to take the trouble of teaching you. As for not being a seaman at all, if you ain't a seaman why and wherefore these seafarin' togs?"

"I'm out in them for the first time. Besides, I'm a schoolboy—I'm under age."

"I can't help nothing o' that sort," was the dogged answer. "You *look* the age, and you're a likely build. If so be as I've made a mistake, we want hands so bad that the officers will take care never to find it out till we're at sea; and even then *I* shan't get into no trouble. Mistakes o' the sort have got to be winked at in these times—till it's too late for to put 'em right." And Ned Cross himself winked artfully. "You'll be above the age afore the king ceases to have need of your services," he continued pleasantly. "Now don't you open your mouth like that, because we can't both talk at the same time, and I ain't done yet. You take my advice—keep cool, and wolunteer."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Bart; "and I *won't* keep cool. I demand to see the captain instantly."

Before the bo'-sun could reply, once more an approaching craft was hailed.

"What boat's that?"

"Here come the rest of our fellows," cried Cross.

But instead of the expected reply, sounds of wild hubbub and commotion arose from the water, where, in the glare of a number of uplifted lanterns, an exciting spectacle was witnessed from the man-o'-war.

Just as the coxswain of the *Hawk's* returning cutter had opened his mouth to return the hail from the sloop, a man (his wrists lashed tightly together) seated next him in the stern-sheets had sprung to his feet, and with one dexterous movement had knocked him clean out of the boat. He was struggling and splashing in the water, while the handicapped passenger who had flung him there was maintaining a fierce but most unequal contest with the two brawny man-o'-war's-men who had been rowing at the stroke thwart. One of these, exasperated beyond the power of self-control, knocked him down. He fell with a heavy thud, nearly capsizing the boat as he did so. Almost at the same moment, the drowning coxswain was hauled over the gunwale, and the boat was brought smartly alongside.

The refractory hand was hauled and shoved on deck. Two men who had been lying in the bows of the cutter were so injured that they had to be carried up the gangway.

A few words from the dripping coxswain sufficed to make matters clear.

“Look at us,” he said as soon as he was far enough from the quarter-deck—“to say nothing of Dowling and Quarters carried below. Just look at *us*.”

By “us” he meant the rest of the late occupants of his boat. They presented a sorry spectacle. Several noses were bleeding, one or two of the men were feeling in their mouths as though in search of lost teeth, and it was evident that black eyes would be numerous in the morning. The speaker himself was the most damaged of the lot. He gazed, without a trace of animosity, at the strapping fellow who had turned him into the river, and went on admiringly,

“Never saw such a beggar to fight in all my life, afloat or ashore. Besides what you saw alongside, he took us all on single-handed—and look at us. Nice way to treat a press-gang.”

Heedless of these remarks, the object of them—blood trickling down his face, and his hands still lashed together—gazed about him. As though the remarks were forced from him by his sense of the utter incongruity of the situation in which he found himself, he said slowly,

“Well, I’ll be scuttled—a peaceable man like me aboard of a man-o’-war !”

Now this big “sparrow” that Ned Cross’s mates had caught for the *Hawk* had been so hemmed in

that Bart had only seen his broad outlines. But there was no mistaking that voice.

"Bob Simmons!" he cried, struggling to the side of the "peaceable" Robert.

"What, *you* here, Master Bart!"

"Now didn't I *say* as you should meet your mate?" demanded Ned Cross. "You wanted for to meet each other, and here you are—all nice and comfortable. Little I knowed as I wasn't lying after all. I call it reg'lar Providential that I should cop *you*, and then for *my* mates to go and cop *your* mate."

Bob bent his head till his lips were on a level with Bart's ear, and muttered below his breath,

"Quick—can you swim?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll make one dash for the Essex shore—follow me. Now!"

They lowered their heads and made a rush to leap overboard.

They were instantly overpowered, and both were taken and placed in confinement 'tween decks.

"We've done for ourselves now," said Simmons bitterly. "It's all my fault—I've chucked away our only chance of appealing to the captain in time."

Bart was about to reply, when sounds reached his ears from the deck, such as he had never heard before.

“ What is it, Bob ? What are they doing ? ”

Of course the sailor heard too the clicking of the capstan-haul and rattle of the chain through the hawser-pipe.

“ Weighing anchor, and preparing to make sail. To-morrow morning, with this breeze, we shall be at sea,” he said.

Within an incredibly short space of time the *Hawk* was standing down river, her canvas spread to a spanking westerly wind. Soon after dawn she was abreast of the Nore light-ship. Heading round the Foreland, she was soon making no less rapid way southwards.

Our two prisoners were provided with a plentiful breakfast. In spite of the trouble they were in, each did justice to it, for Bart’s healthy young appetite demanded satisfaction, whatever the state of his mind might be ; and as for Bob he was ready, with a sailor’s easy capability of adapting himself to his surroundings, “ shaking himself down ” (as he would have expressed it) to the inevitable.

“ Whatever’s before us,” he philosophically remarked, with his mouth full, “ grub won’t make it worse.”

Shortly afterwards they were conducted on deck where they fell in line with four other pressed men, their fellow victims of a rough and ready system of recruiting which was as hateful and un-English as it was necessary in those parlous times.

"Attention!" cried Ned Cross the bo'-sun.
"Here comes the fust loo-tenant."

The officer scrutinized the little batch of recruits keenly and closely, though very quickly. Leaving our hero and his friend to the last he addressed a few questions to the other four, which were answered surlily, though with no actual disrespect. They had all been impressed legally enough, and were forthwith appointed to different watches.

With Bart and Bob the case was different. He listened with a slight frown to what they had to say, and went below to report their representations to the captain, who in his turn listened just as quietly.

"Let the men be brought before me at once, Mr. McCroft," was all he said.

A minute afterwards they were taken below, both uncovering as they stood for the first time in the presence of Captain John Agars.

They waited in silence for him to speak. Fixing a pair of piercing gray eyes upon them, he asked sharply.

"Now, my men what have you to say?"

Up spoke Bob Simmons.

"In the first place, ye're honor, this here young gennelman ain't a man at all. He's not even seventeen yet. Consequentially, sir, he ain't eighteen, and under eighteen he can't be took to serve the king by force."

Captain Agars looked Bart rapidly up and down.

"Speak for yourself, my lad," he said, not unkindly.

Endeavoring to be as brief as possible, and to speak only to the point, Bart told him who and what he was, and why he had come to London.

"What was your object in wishing to visit Australia?"

The boy flushed painfully.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but that is my business."

No shade of annoyance appeared upon the captain's sun-tanned face. He turned quietly to Simmons.

"What about yourself?"

"I'm as free from 'pressment, sir, as this lad, for yesterday morning I signed articles as bo'-sun of the *Blue-bell*, a bark of more than one hundred tons."

Captain Agars bit his lip, and remained silent for several minutes. Then he said, firmly but kindly,

"If what you say is true, I am sorry for both of you. But you have your own violence to thank for having been deprived of the opportunity of telling me before it was too late what you tell me now. I will not ask to look at your papers at present, for the simple reason that it *is* too late. We are now at sea. I am bound with urgent despatches to the squadron in West Indian waters, and I wouldn't lose an hour of this breeze to put an admiral ashore. Now take my advice, my lads—or, to speak plainly, it will be worse for you.

Volunteer to serve His Majesty. As volunteers, you will be better off than as pressed men. Further than this, if you do your duty well and cheerfully, I will—if I am able to satisfy myself of the strict truthfulness of what you have told me—represent your case in the proper quarter. I daresay you will understand what I mean when I offer you that promise. Do as I say—and go and report yourselves for duty to the officer of the watch, as volunteers on board His Majesty's sloop."

Bob Simmons nudged Bart with his elbow, and answered for the pair of them.

"Thank ye, sir," said he, "for speaking to us kind and fair. Begging ye're honor's pardon, you may have heard tell of a party by the name o' 'Obson. As we ain't got no choice, we volunteers. *Our* name's 'Obson, sir."

Captain Agars could scarcely repress a smile as the two "volunteers" left his cabin. As they stepped up the companion-way, Bob observed solemnly to his young comrade, "Let this here be a lesson to you. If it hadn't been for wiolence last night, we might ha' stood a chance with the old man, who spoke square enough. Learn this here motto—'*Never no Wiolence*'—and likewise learn to act up to it, and grow up for to be a peaceable man."

For the life of him Bart could not help a laugh as he asked, "Like you, Bob?"

"Eh?" said Bob uneasily. "D'ye mean to

say Look, look—look there !” he broke off with sudden excitement as they reached the deck. “ If I *warn’t* a peaceable man, how long would my fists be down now ? Look there—look at him !”

Bart had already looked and recognized. In man-o’-war’s-man uniform, Wrecker Mike stood almost within striking distance.

“ Another friend aboard ?” said Ned Cross, as Black, with one frightened look at the victim of his knavishness on the night of the wreck, hurried away forward. “ We pressed that chap for what he’s worth a week ago at Sheerness.”

A midshipman came swaggering towards the quarter-deck. “ Out of my way, you fellow,” he cried contemptuously, treating Bart to a rough push on the shoulder.

Turning sharply round, Bart Arber found himself standing face to face with his late school-fellow, Peter Rudge.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S SLOOP-OF-WAR.

THE *Hawk* was a sloop of almost two hundred and fifty tons—(though we ought to speak first of her gunnage rather than her tonnage)—as taut and tight a little craft as any ship in the navy of His Majesty of Great Britain. Properly handled, she was capable of sailing at a high rate of speed, and had, indeed, made one or two of the fastest passages then on record.

For a vessel of her size she was very well armed, being equipped on her present voyage with eighteen guns, carrying two long eighteen-pounders in the bows, six eighteen-pounder carronades amidships, and ten twelve-pounders. Her arm-chest was a capacious and a heavy one, carrying considerably more small arms than her present underhanded crew of one hundred and forty all told, officers and men, required.

To say nothing of her services as a tender and as a despatch boat, the *Hawk* had, especially under Captain Agars, a brilliant record of exploits in cutting out ships of the enemy along the coasts of France and Spain, and in following up chases where bigger vessels could not go.

As we know, her present mission was to convey important despatches to the English squadron in the West Indies. Once there, she was to be at the orders of the Admiral in command, who was sure to find her plenty of work to do.

Captain John Agars had had a singularly adventurous career. Of his forty-five years, more than thirty had been spent in the navy. By a rapid series of special services he had won early and rapid promotion to the quarter-deck of a fine frigate, the daring recklessness of his exploits in which had for years been condoned by their success. In one unfortunate affair, however, when he had pitted his frigate against odds which no really prudent commander, even in those days, would have faced, he lost her to the enemy, and himself spent several months in a French prison, from which (having refused his parole) he escaped by the exercise of that same spirit of wild daring which had taken him there. Although acquitted by the court-martial that tried him, his relegation to the command of the sloop was really in the nature of a temporary degradation by way of censure. He chafed sorely under it, and longed for an opportunity of retrieving his position by some fresh deed of derring-do that should have a luckier issue. This irrepressible spirit of his was so well known that his first lieutenant had been selected for him, in the hope that he would prove more or less of a counterpoise, as it were. Although caution was rather the last than the

first characteristic looked for in a naval commander in those stirring times, still a modicum of it was indispensable. If Captain Agars had any caution at all, it was singularly little. But Mr. McCroft, this first lieutenant, possessed the virtue in fairly large proportions. He was a shrewd, careful Scotchman, with an evenly-balanced mind. No one could truthfully deny his bravery, but at the same time his cautiousness was at least equally beyond dispute. To know him was to respect him.

To know Captain Agars was both to respect and love him. His very failing—if failing it were—only endeared him more to the men who served under him. They idolized him, and would have followed him anywhere, even to certain death. He made them feel, somehow, that his lot was theirs and theirs his. He was no martinet; in fact, he was not even a strict disciplinarian. But among the better class of men his simple displeasure was more dreaded than the lash of a stricter master. There was a well authenticated tradition in the service that all through his long years of command he had only ordered one man to be flogged, and that then his heart gave way after the second stroke of the cat-o'-nine-tails, when with his own hands he assisted to release the culprit, who afterwards died in interposing his own body between his captain's heart and the bayonet of a French marine.

Such, in brief, was the character of the kindly-

natured, big-hearted, chivalrous, and reckless commander of the *Hawk*.

Of the first officer we have already spoken. The master, the second and (acting) third lieutenants, the chief petty officers, and the others in more or less authority, were almost all of them good fellows.

Of the crew proper, about a hundred of them were old hands who had shared before now the perils of "the battle and the breeze" under their present captain—splendid fellows every one. The others were a nondescript lot, who had been picked up we know how. Personally Captain Agars detested the system of recruiting by means of the press-gang, and always shut his eyes to its operation as far as he could. But, as an almost invariable rule, the men so obtained soon accepted their fate cheerfully enough under so gallant and so lenient a man, and stood by him "with the best of them."

By and by we shall know more of the captain, officers, and crew of the man-o'-war on board of which our friends Bart and Bob so unexpectedly found themselves enlisted, as well as of the good ship herself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT WITH THE "VENGEUR."

BART was sea-sick. He got better.

These two circumstances of sea-sickness and recovery, thus briefly stated, are frequently considered a justification for two chapters. I prefer to finish with them in two sentences.

Within a week he had found his sea-legs and settled down to his duty well and cheerfully, and it was soon recognized that he had in him the makings of a smart sailor. As for Bob Simmons, one might have supposed he had been on board a man-o'-war all his life.

Off the coasts of France and Spain a number of luggers, poleacres, and other craft were sighted, but the mission on which the *Hawk* was bound was of too pressing a nature to allow of her losing time in making prizes of such small fry.

When, however, approaching the Azores, a French frigate gave chase to the sloop, Captain Agars itched to haul his wind and engage the bigger ship.

"She's not gaining on us, Mr. McCroft," he

said mournfully, scanning the frigate through his glass. "We're out-sailing her fast."

"Yes, sir," agreed the first lieutenant contentedly.

Captain Agars cast his eye over the sloop's splendid spread of white canvas. If only he could think it was more than she could safely carry! If only it were his duty to ease her by shortening sail the Frenchman might overhaul her in an hour or two.

"We shall have to take in top-s'ls, Mr. McCroft, if it blows much harder."

"Ye—es. But we shall have given that fellow leg-bail before then."

"I'm afraid—yes, I think so."

And long before night, long before those top-sails were furled, the frigate had abandoned the hopeless pursuit.

But between a week and a fortnight later, a whisper gained currency that there was after all a hope of a brush before the outward passage was accomplished. The whisper was supposed to have been originally brought from the quarter-deck, and therefore it carried authority with it, so to speak. Before long the hope ceased to be a whispered one; the matter was openly spoken of, for the issue of certain special orders made it positive that something was in the wind. When it was definitely known what that something was, a sort of feverish, though restrained, excitement pervaded the whole ship.

A pirate vessel that had long been the dread, scourge, and terror of all the Western seas was likely to be cruising somewhere in the *Hawk's* present latitude. This pirate—known as the *Sea Serpent*—was a giant of a pirate in every respect. Originally a large Yankee clipper schooner, she had been captured by a cut-throat gang of desperadoes, whose numbers were constantly recruited by the scum of almost every nationality. The *Sea Serpent* was faster, more strongly manned and more formidably armed than any rover then known to be scouring the ocean.

She had lately turned her special attention to the richly-freighted homeward-bound West India-men. Wo betide any merchantman that sailed without a convoy? It was bad enough to fall into the hands of the French or the Spaniards, but infinitely worse to become the prey of the cruel *Sea Serpent*.

Urgent and indignant representations had been made to the Admiralty, and many vain attempts had been made to catch the clipper. Captain Agars had been instructed to deal with the pirate if he fell in with her, though he was not to deviate from his course to look for her.

Early one morning a homeward-bound trader was spoken which signaled that she had been chased by a suspicious sail, only escaping by altering her course under cover of the night.

After this the excitement on board the little man-o'-war became keener and keener. Every-

body longed to catch sight of that "suspicious sail," and everybody hoped that she would prove to be the pirate craft.

Bart and his faithful friend often discussed together the all-engaging topic.

"Peaceable as I am," said Bob, on the last of these occasions, "I'd forfeit my pay for to have a good go at this rascally *Sea Sarpint*. I've been on ships when the sight of her would ha' paled every face aboard, but to meet her now—with all these here guns, and the arm-chest below!"

Bob Simmons smacked his lips.

"Everybody seems to think that if we succeed in concealing that we're a man-o'-war there's a fair chance of the affair coming off," replied Bart; "but it appears to me that if things go on as they are going, *I* shall have a little fight all on my own account first."

"How so?"

"I mean with Peter Rudge. I've told you about the bad feeling between us at school. I should be only too glad to forget it all, but he won't let me. Ever since we both recovered from seasickness he's goaded and irritated and bullied me till I'm getting desperate."

"Master Bart," said Simmons earnestly (he still generally slipped in the "Master" when they were alone together), "leave him alone. Bear it, and leave him alone. Be peaceable. Remember you're not on fair and equal terms for fighting him now, for he's got the rating of an officer. It's hard,

but bear it. To strike an officer in any circumstances is too serious. And if it's hard for you to bear with him, ain't it hard for me to keep my hands off Mike Black? Me and you have both got to lie low, Master Bart, till the proper time comes."

As ill-luck would have it, up came the midshipman himself. The two messmates separated. Young Rudge almost immediately started on the unfortunate Bart, who notwithstanding the sound advice he had just received, lost his temper. One of the worst things about losing one's temper is that one is almost certain to lose one's self-control with it. Such was the case now with Bart. One word led to the proverbial other word. At last Peter exclaimed :

"Be careful. That fight of ours wasn't finished, remember."

"We'll finish it now, if you like. Take off your uniform and come below. You shelter yourself under your cocked hat. You're a coward," retorted Bart.

"'Coward!' You dare to call an officer a coward? I'll report you for this—I'll have you in irons. *Convict!*"

The word was scarcely out of his mouth—he hadn't time to turn—before Bart knocked him, face down, into the scuppers. He was up in a moment, and faced round, but this time Bob Simmons stood between the old antagonists. Before he could say a word a sharp, short command from

the second lieutenant, the officer of the watch, sobered the pair of them.

"Mr. Wilkinson," began Rudge, "I report this"

But he was cut short. Mr. Wilkinson understood the character of the captain so well that he was loath to make a serious matter of what he had heard and seen. He turned to Bart, and pointed to the main-topgallant masthead.

"Up with you!" was all he said. Bart touched his cap.

"Aye, aye, sir!"—and up he climbed to his place of punishment.

"I'm glad, Mr. Rudge, that you don't make a formal complaint," said the officer, "for if you did I should have to contrast what I have seen of your own behavior in several respects with the conduct expected from an officer and a gentleman. You fell into the scuppers just now, I believe?"

Peter was sharp enough to take the hint conveyed by the lieutenant's manner.

"Yes," he stammered.

"Quite so—a trifling accident. You had better go below. But before you go, Mr. Rudge, let me warn you that your manner and language are open to improvement. You are aware that a midshipman has the rating only of an officer, and not the commission. I have heard of cases in which a captain has used his power to abolish the rating, and sent young gentlemen like you before the mast."

The crestfallen midshipman hurried below without another word.

"I've had a lucky escape," soliloquized Bart as he reached his lofty perch. "Wonder how long he'll keep me up here."

Five bells had just been struck—a fine, clear morning, with a light breeze rippling the surface of the waves. Shading his keen young eyes from the sun with his hand, he scanned the horizon. The next moment,

"Sail ho!" he cried.

"Sail on the larb'd bow!" roared the lookout man the following instant.

"Sail on the larboard bow!" repeated the officer of the watch, who almost immediately went below to report the sail to the captain.

Quickly as the latter made his appearance on deck, the news that a strange sail was in sight had already spread amongst the entire crew of the *Hawk* like wildfire. The hope beat high in every breast that at last the pirate had been sighted, and would be brought to bay.

"If that's the *Sea Sarpint*," observed Ned Cross, "I only hope she won't show us her heels."

"That's the danger," grumbled Bob Simmons. "I know the *Sea Sarpint* of old—she did ought to be called the *Sea Devil* by rights. And I tell you, she's got wings, and if she chooses to use 'em even the *Hawk* couldn't catch her in a week o' Sundays."

This lurking fear that the pirate would get

away had rankled in the breasts of the sailors for a long time. However, everything had been done in anticipation of the meeting to give the man-o'-war a good deal of the appearance of an inoffensive merchantman. If the pirate fell into the trap she would be certain to come to close quarters in the expectation of finding an easy prey.

Long and intently Captain Agars gazed through his glass at the distant sail.

"What do you make of her, Mr. Wilkinson?"

"Man-o'-war, sir," replied the second lieutenant promptly.

"Send my compliments to Mr. McCroft, and say that I desire his presence on the quarter-deck immediately."

"Very good, sir."

"What do you make of yonder sail, Mr. McCroft?" he asked, as the first lieutenant appeared on the scene. Up went the glass to his eye.

"From what I can make out of her trim, sir, and the squareness of her yards, she's a man-o'-war. And I think a frigate."

"You are right," agreed the captain after a pause. "She has the wind, and if it freshens will outsail us rapidly. You will see that preparations are quietly made, Mr. McCroft, in case she should hoist the enemy's colors."

"Very good, sir."

The wind was already freshening, and the strange frigate soon proved the correctness of

Captain Agar's estimate of her sailing powers in it.

"She ain't the *Sea Sarpint*," muttered Bob Simmons, "but she flies as though she'd plucked some o' the same feathers."

His disappointment that the stranger, whoever she was, was not the longed-for pirate, was shared by all on board.

As the morning wore on the distance between the two vessels lessened, till the stranger's advantage in both size and armament was plainly apparent. The frigate had so shaped her course as to make it evident that it was her intention to intercept the course of the sloop. Captain Agars had remained on deck ever since the strange sail had been reported to him, his excitement gradually increasing the whole time.

"The sooner we find out what she is, the better," he said at last. "Hoist the colors!"

In a few moments the "meteor flag of England" was fluttering proudly in the breeze. With eager interest the officers and crew of the *Hawk* waited the answering ensign of the frigate, which was run up quickly enough.

The French Tricolor!

Captain John Agars had found his chance again at last.

"Mr. McCroft," he said quietly but coolly, "I should have no right to pit His Majesty's sloop against that fellow by choice."

"No, sir."

"But the action is inevitable."

"In the circumstances, it is, sir."

"We'll keep afloat as long as we can, and if we can't beat him off we'll go down with the colors flying."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. McCroft, as calmly as though only an adjournment below deck had been suggested, instead of a descent into Davy Jones's locker. Now that fighting—"in face of fearful odds"—had become a duty he was as ready for fighting as the dare-all skipper himself.

"Order all hands aft."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the Scotchman cheerfully.

The next moment the bo'sun's shrill pipe communicated the order to the ship's company. Bart, who had been long before called down from the mast-head, of course came from forward with the rest of them.

"My lads," said Captain Agars, "yonder vessel is a French frigate of the largest class, but this sloop is not going to strike to her, for we're British. She's bigger than we are, more strongly manned and more strongly armed. But British seamen are not good at counting the odds in a case of duty. We have never been taught that sort of arithmetic, and we're too old to learn now. The longer the odds the more the glory. The greater the risk the greater the honor. Beat to quarters!"

A tremendous cheer followed this brief but stirring address.

Quietly, but very quickly, arms were served out. Every man took up his post. The ports were opened, and the guns run out.

Now the sloop was a very handy vessel for maneuvering, and on this fact Captain Agars relied in opening the engagement.

As the two ships approached each other he ordered the sloop's helm to be put up. She was off in a moment, and sent a raking and magnificently-laid broadside into the frigate's bows. The fight between the *Hawk* and the *Vengeur* had commenced. Then, instead of sailing on and receiving his antagonist's broadside—as doubtless the Frenchman anticipated would happen—Agars kept his helm down to wear ship and keep on the frigate's port bow.

The Frenchman could not luff and bring his port broadside to bear without going about, being already pretty close to the wind; so kept away, and by so doing gave the English captain a chance to luff, and deliver his other broadside—a chance of which it is needless to say he availed himself. Again the contents of nine guns went crashing along the frigate's deck.

Then the sloop was kept away also, and broadsides were exchanged. The sloop's crew were cool and confident—the frigate's men unnerved by the two raking broadsides that had swept along their deck. The sloop's fire was again the more effective.

But the wind becoming too light for maneuver-

ing, the two vessels lay side by side, hammering away.

This state of things would of course have given the more lightly-armed vessel no chance, had it not been for the advantages gained at first. As it was, the superior serving of their guns by the at present elated English tars, together with the serious loss already inflicted upon the Frenchman, went some way towards equalizing matters for a little while.

But too soon the odds in favor of the frigate, in men and the size and number of guns, began to tell. The odds were too unequal. Some of the frigate's shots passed through the sloop's bulwarks and top-sides, and one or two penetrated below the water-line. With both her hull and rigging injured, the majority of her officers and almost half her crew dead or wounded, the *Hawk* kept her colors flying still ; but into the brave hearts that still beat aboard of her the sullen conviction was becoming irrepressible that she could not continue the fight much longer.

It was a comfort to think how much the *Vengeur* must have suffered also ! The sloop lying so much lower in the water, the enemy must have been badly hulled.

A high-flying shot from the Frenchman cut in two the sloop's top-gallant yard. The fragments threatening to fall on those beneath, topmen were sent up temporarily to secure them. Amongst

the hands ordered aloft were Bob Simmons, Dowling, and Quarters.

As they all sprang up the rigging a rain of bullets pelted about them. Two men were struck, and fell crashing upon the deck below. Mike Black was one of the two men who were instantly ordered to take their places.

"Fire away, my hearties," yelled Quarters, captain of the main-top; "the flag's flying yet!"

The brave fellows around him raised a cheer. But there was one man who did not join in it. That man was Black—the only coward on board. Having an idea that the higher he was the less danger he was in, he had passed the others, and stood above them on the top-gallant rigging.

He cast his frightened eyes aloft to the mast-head.

The flag *was* flying still, and whilst it flew the Frenchmen *would* "fire away." But once it fell their firing would cease. All below was thick with smoke. His mates aloft with him were intent on their work, holding their lives in their hands.

In the confusion—in the worse confusion that would follow the act—who would know *how* the flag fell? Who would know that *his* hand cut it down—his hand with the knife in it?

Once the flag was down the firing would cease—the firing of the big guns that were sweeping the decks below and the hot hail that was cutting up the ship's gear. It would all cease—the firing

would all be ended—the fight would be finished—once the colors were down.

That was the only thought in his craven heart—"the colors down!" There was the ensign, flying still.

Only a little higher—only a single cut on the halyards with that keen knife—and down it would droop and fall.

For a moment he hesitated. The next instant a bullet almost struck the very blade of the knife in his right hand. The following bullet might find its billet in his heart. Any risk was a less risk than that.

Frenzied with fear, up he sprang, raised his coward hand, and severed in twain the halyards of the flag, just as the sloop gave a lurch. Then he slid down, and reached the top-sail yard.

The flag, freed from its supports, fell from the mast-head into the trough of the sea.

As it touched the water, Bart Arber saw it.

He didn't stop to think. He saw the flag. With no idea of the truth—only knowing that it had fallen without any surrender of the sloop—mad with the excitement of the first fight he had ever been in save at fisticuffs—he leaped over the bulwarks into the waves.

After the flag!

Just in time, but too late to prevent it, three witnesses had beheld Mike Black's dastardly deed—Quarters, Dowling, and Simmons.

The instant he knew that he had been detected,

Black tried to descend lower and swing himself clear of the sloop, in order that he might swim out and find refuge on the frigate as a deserter, but with an almost inarticulate cry of rage, Bob, perceiving his intention, sprang at the traitor and gripped him by the throat.

Locked in each other's fierce embrace, for a few moments they swayed dizzily upon the yard before they fell—fell together into the sea.

The instant the Frenchmen perceived that the English colors were down they raised a frantic cheer, and with chivalrous quickness the order was given to cease firing, just as Agars was about to take his old advantage of a suddenly rising breeze.

“What are they cheering for?” cried Captain Agars—all ignorant that his colors had been struck. “Now, lads, let her have it again. Fire!”

A murderous fire followed the word. The frigate staggered under it. Wild cries of indignation at the Englishman's apparent treachery rose from her still crowded decks, littered with the bodies of the dead and dying and wounded. So fierce, so mad was the indignation that the sense of discipline was lost—the men got out of hand. Even whilst their officers were endeavoring to restore order, another terrific cannonade from the *Hawk* struck the frigate broadside, and a shower of bullets swept her deck. Then the rage and indignation of her crew were swallowed

up by an emotion stronger still—that of wild terror.

As the smoke cleared off, the Englishmen saw a sight they were little prepared for. The *Vengeur* had put her helm up, and was running away before the wind! Incredible as this appeared, the next few minutes proved it. If the sloop had had enough, the frigate had had too much—she was off and away. Although pursuit was impossible, the fight was over; and though the *Hawk* hadn't made a capture, she could claim the victory. A deafening "Hurrah!" was raised by her survivors as soon as their astonishment allowed them to use their voices.

Where was Bart? Where were Simmons and Black?

In the water yet, struggling to reach the sloop's side. The storm of shot and shell had passed over their heads without touching them.

Between Bart's teeth was the flag he had saved. One of Bob Simmon's hands still gripped Mike Black by the throat.

As the cheering of his valiant crew subsided, Captain Agars—the blood trickling from a flesh wound upon his cheek, and with shots through both his epaulets—gave one proud glance upward to the mast-head. He gripped the rail of the quarter-deck tightly with both hands as he cried in startled tones.

"Where are the Colors?"

CHAPTER X.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

IN the midst of the brief confusion that prevailed immediately after the fight, the three forms in the water were seen and rescued.

Already the decks were being washed and cleared, the wounded being rapidly carried from them into the crowded cock-pit. Hands were aloft clearing the torn and entangled rigging.

Bart and Simmons, and subsequently Quarters and Dowling, were taken before the Captain. When he realized the act of treachery of which the three last-named had been witnesses, when he realized that he had continued to fight the sloop after her colors were down—that he had placed himself in a position to be regarded by a gallant enemy as worse than a pirate—he looked as though he would have fallen dead in a paroxysm of a mingled passion, shame, and mortification. He could scarcely frame in words the order that Michael Black be instantly clapped in irons.

The day was almost over before the first and most necessary tasks after the conflict had been accomplished on board the sloop.

"I'm afraid, sir," reported the master, entering the cabin with a grave face, "I'm afraid, sir, that the ship can't float long. The carpenter reports that the water in the hold is gaining."

Captain Agars listened quietly to his report, and ordered the company to be mustered.

"My men," he said, "the sloop is badly injured. The injuries to the bottom are serious. The pumps must be kept going all night, while carpenters' repairs are proceeded with. By the morning she should be water-tight again."

He ended with a few words of appreciation and encouragement, which put fresh heart into the brave fellows upon whose exertions the fate of the ship depended. But in the night one of the sudden, short, furious storms common to the region sprang up. The craft lived through the storm itself, which ended almost as suddenly as it had begun, but before morning dawned all hope of keeping her afloat another day had to be abandoned. Would she float till the morning? was the only question.

Captain Agars's first thought at daybreak was to bury the remaining dead (some had been already cast overboard) before leaving the sinking ship. "But no," he reflected, "the living first."

The launch and two cutters were the least injured of the sloop's boats, and these he ordered to be prepared for launching.

Provisions, stores, etc., were placed in them, everything was made ready, and the order given

to lower away. The wounded were all put safely in them first, and then the crews, to the number of scarcely eighty, were told off. Only eighty men left alive and hale!

Into the launch a supply of arms was lowered. Before he himself sprang into her, Captain Agars—the last man to leave—saw that the bodies of the dead to be left on board the doomed vessel were all decently and reverently laid out. Among these dead was poor Mr. McCroft.

In sad silence the boats pushed off, rowing the minute stroke in honor of the gallant officers and men who had found their coffin in their ship. At a distance of a few cables' length, the boats were rounded to head the poor old *Hawk*, and the men lay on their oars, while the captain produced and opened a prayer-book.

All eyes were directed to the sinking sloop, and all heads were uncovered, as he commenced to read the solemn service for the burial of the dead at sea. As he reached the words, "We therefore commit their bodies to the deep," the *Hawk* was seen to give a sudden roll, and immediately afterwards she slowly sank below the waves, every oar of the boats being upraised in a last salute as she disappeared from view forever.

Keeping as closely together as was practicable, the three craft had not proceeded far on the course laid by Captain Agars when a commotion broke out on board the second cutter, in charge of Peter Rudge, who was so incapable of coping

with it that it speedily assumed almost the proportions of a mutiny. The men demanded to be allowed to heave Michael Black overboard, manacled as he was.

"It'll bring us harm to carry such a swab," they growled. All had heard what he had been guilty of.

"Let them as wants him," said Dowling boldly, "carry him. We won't have the varmint in this boat."

"Over with him," shouted the others.

"No, no," screamed Black. "Leave me alone. I didn't do it. It fell down by accident."

"Then call it a accident when we 'eaves you to the sharks."

"Sharks? No, no. Look—look there. There's a shark following us."

"So there be," said Dowling, after a look aft. "And a empty-looking shark, too. You'll just about fill him."

This sally was greeted with a roar of laughter, in the midst of which the launch drew along-side.

"What's the matter here, Mr. Rudge?" demanded Captain Agars sternly.

"The men are clamoring to throw the prisoner overboard, sir."

The lately turbulent crew of the second cutter quailed before the keen eyes turned so calmly upon them.

"The first man who moves to put a hand on

the prisoner will have good cause to remember that though our ship has gone down, Duty and Discipline remain the same. Not a man is released from either. I am sorry to have to remind you of this so soon. As for the prisoner, you may bear in mind also that there are plenty of yard-arms left above water to swing him from when the time comes."

The men received this ominous hint of the doom for which Black Mike was reserved as though it had been the promise of a personal favor and special kindness to themselves.

"Thank'ee, sir," they said heartily. Mike shivered.

In the middle watch of that night, the launch and cutters found themselves almost under the bows of a large brig.

"Ship ahoy !"

"Boats ahoy ! What boats are those ?"

"Boats of His Britannic Majesty's sloop-of-war *Hawk*. What ship is that ?"

Bart's heart seemed to leap into his mouth as he heard the answering shout.

"Brig *Leo*, Halifax for Port Royal."

"Heave to !"

CHAPTER XI.

NIGHT CAPTURE OF THE PIRATE.

IN the course of a few minutes the survivors of the *Hawk* found themselves safe on board the merchantman. Captain Caines met the officers himself at the head of the gangway and conducted them to his cabin. Every attention was paid to the wounded, and the rest of the men-o'-war's men were accommodated as comfortably as was possible with the crew of the *Leo*. As she was carrying several passengers and a draft of twenty soldiers for one of the regiments stationed at Jamaica, the *Leo's* resources were considerably overtaxed by the unexpected addition to her company.

"Bob," said Bart, "are you going to ask to see your old captain to-night? I feel as though I couldn't sleep a wink till I have spoken to him, and asked him—about what I have to ask him."

"I know, Bart, I know. We'll see him together in the morning."

"Not to-night?"

"No, we'd better leave it now till the morning,

when things will ha' shaken down a bit. D'ye know what I've been thinking?"

"What, Bob?"

"Why, that you'd better make a clean breast of it to Cap'en Agars at the same time as we sees my old skipper. After what you done in a-leaping overboard and saving the flag when that black-hearted swab cut it down, there's nothing that a man like the cap'en wouldn't do for you. It's the pluck of the thing he'll think of, not that there was plenty more bunting in the locker."

"Surely he'd do at least as much for you as he would for me. It was you who . . ."

"I know what I did—I know," returned Bob uneasily; "but the most peaceable man in the world—if there *is* a more peaceablest man than me—would ha' done as much and the same if he'd see'd what I saw."

"Well, leaving we'll say both our claims on the captain's good-will out of the question, I'm more than willing to tell him everything. I believe, Bob, from my heart, that if there's anything that that man can do to help me—to help me reach and save my father—he'll do it."

"He will—he'll do it honest and true. I'm sartin of it."

The interview between the two captains, Bart, and Bob did not take place till the next afternoon. As the two "hands" doffed their caps and entered the cabin, a young lady—the most beauti-

ful girl, Bart thought, he had ever seen—rose and left it, first kissing Captain Caines lovingly.

“Good-bye now, papa dear for the present.”

“Good-bye, Katie darling,” replied her father.

As she passed them, Bob knuckled his forehead and Bart bowed.

Captain Caines shook Bob’s hard fist heartily, a glow of pride and pleasure suffusing the sailor’s honest face. Bart was at least equally proud and equally happy when Captain Agars paid him a similar compliment.

“My boy,” said the ex-commander of the *Hawk*, “I have not had an earlier opportunity of thanking you for your gallant deed. Your pluck will not be unrewarded. Your forgetfulness of the fact that we could have hoisted fresh colors was the forgetfulness of a brave and chivalrous mind.”

He turned with a remark of warm-hearted praise to Bob Simmons.

That modest worthy was so taken aback that he was incapable of any response beyond a nervous shuffling of his feet. Bart replied for the pair of them.

“We feel rewarded now, sir. We only did what it seemed our duty to do.”

Then he continued earnestly :

“The first time I saw you, Captain Agars, aboard the *Hawk*, you asked me the reason why I was so anxious to go to Australia. I declined to tell you then, but am anxious to do so now. I

am anxious to tell my story to both you and Captain Caines."

"Tell us whatever you like, my boy."

"Certainly," said Caines. "Simmons has just told me who you are."

They both listened with marked and increasing interest to all he had to say. Bart finished by drawing from his pocket-book (almost the only thing of his personal belongings besides his clothes which he had had upon him when pressed into His Majesty's service) his father's I.O.U. for five hundred pounds, with the letter in which it had been enclosed, and of which Bob Simmons had been the bearer from Captain Caines.

The latter took the papers in his hands, and instantly identified them.

"Your father is as innocent as I am," he exclaimed "I would stake my life upon it."

"Thank you, Captain Caines," said Bart warmly and gratefully. "Did you see my father, sir, after you lent him the money?"

"No. From the moment I placed the notes in his hand until the present I've never seen him again. If I could have been called as a witness at the trial, my evidence might have altered everything. My poor old friend! Tried, convicted, and sentenced—all without the knowledge, until now, of the one man who might have saved him—who would have followed up every clue until he *had* saved him."

"I am going to save him now. But how can

I do so till I can reach Australia and find him, and obtain from him a knowledge of the missing links in the chain of the evidence of his innocence?"

"Listen to me," said Captain Agars. "We are proceeding now to Port Royal. On arriving there, I will keep my word. I have not forgotten. I will do all I can to secure the discharge of yourself and your brave friend here."

Bob shuffled his feet eloquently.

"If I succeed you will be free to carry out your original plan of proceeding together to Port Jackson. You need not be without means."

"No," said Captain Caines. "Come in," he called, as a tap was heard at the door, which immediately opened and admitted a bright-looking apprentice.

"A sail has just been sighted about three points on the weather bow, sir. Mr. Preece desired me to say that he doesn't like the look of her."

"Tell Mr. Preece I'll come above directly," said the skipper of the *Leo*. "Will you accompany me, sir?" he added to Captain Agars.

"Certainly," replied the latter.

"You show a good set of teeth," he remarked as he noticed the brig's guns, "and keep them clean."

The merchant skipper acknowledged the compliment with a bow.

"I've had to fight before, and I flatter myself that the brig's better prepared to protect herself than most ships of her size."

The instant Captain Caines clapped his eyes on the stranger, he cried excitedly :

“Captain Agars, I know that ship. *She's the Sea Serpent!*”

He was not alone in identifying the long, low-lying schooner, with clean-cut bows and tapering masts. There were men in his crew who had met her before. She *was* the *Sea Serpent*, and was heading for the brig with a light wind all in her favor. Any lingering doubt was dispelled when presently she came up and fired a shot as a warning to the merchantman to heave to.

Bob Simmons the peaceable fairly danced with glee at the prospect of another fight so soon.

“We ought to trap her somehow, Bart!” he exclaimed. “The brig herself is well armed, and she's got eighty men-o'-war's-men aboard her, with plenty of arms—to say nothing of the sojers.”

“Can't we call her to account at last?” said Captain Caines, quite as joyfully though less demonstratively. “We won't try to run away this time.”

“And we'll take care that *she* doesn't run away if we can help it,” said the impetuous Agars. “Our plan will be to hide our strength until she runs alongside us, or we run alongside her. We're strong enough not only to resist her boarders, but to board her ourselves.”

The wind continued very light, and what there was was falling with the day. Soon scarcely a

breath rippled the surface of the water. The vessels remained separated by a distance of about a couple of miles.

"This will mean a night attack, Captain Agars," said Caines earnestly, "for the pirates will fear that a night breeze might enable us to give them the slip. In the darkness they'll send their boats to board us. They'll find a little surprise prepared for them."

"Captain Caines, I have formed a plan by which we can make sure of a capture. There can be little doubt but that they will try the night attack you speak of. Although we can repulse that attack easily, some of them are likely enough to get away, and if a breeze springs up the pirate herself will up sail and give *us* the slip, having discovered what a Tartar she has fallen in with."

"True, sir—but what is your plan?"

"Simply this. You have your crew, soldiers, and male passengers. I'll leave you besides about twenty of my men. When darkness falls I'll put off in my boats with the other sixty. I shall lay to just out of sight of the pirate. The attack of her boats on you will be my signal to run my boats alongside her—board her, overpower the crew that will have remained, and take possession of her."

"She's as good as ours," cried Captain Caines.

All was ready. The men's stations had been arranged, the brig's guns carefully overhauled, the small arms cleaned, swords and cutlasses

sharpened ; precautions being taken to hide all these preparations from the pirate. The red-coats and blue-jackets had been carefully concealed the whole time.

Down fell the sudden darkness. The cutters and launch were silently lowered, and pulled off with muffled oars. Every man was armed to the teeth.

Before they started, Katie Caines and Bart had a little conversation.

"Papa has told me your story," said Katie ; "and oh ! I do hope that—that all will come right. I love *my* father so very, very much, that I think I understand all you must feel. I can't help being sure that you will succeed. I am sure that God will help you."

Bart thanked her for her kind words with tears in his eyes.

"Are you going off with your captain in the boats to-night to that dreadful pirate there?"

"Yes, Miss Caines."

"I shall ask God to protect you—all."

Captain Agars had carefully noted the exact position of the *Sea Serpent*, and laid a course that took the boats astern of her.

As they sped along through the darkness, Bart Arber felt all the braver for the thought that Katie was praying for them.

"Easy all !"

Silently the boats stopped. Then followed a long spell of waiting, seeming longer because of

the feverish excitement that filled every heart. In the midst of it all Bart found himself speculating as to how old Katie Caines was.

"About a year younger than I am," he decided.

"Oh ! ain't it glorious ?" whispered Bob Simmons ; " ain't it glorious, Master Bart ? The poor old *Hawk's* done for, but here we are a-waiting to seize after all the very pirate she was looking for. Oh ! ain't it glorious ?"

" Silence ! " said Captain Agars sternly. " Mr. Wilkinson," he added in an undertone, leaning over the stern-sheets to the second cutter, " listen : do you hear anything ?"

Borne far over the water, from the direction of the schooner, came the sound of the creaking of blocks, followed by a plash.

" Yes, sir. I think they're lowering."

It was impossible for the waiting man-o'-war's-men to know at what moment the *Sea Serpent's* boats left her side and stole rapidly away for the merchantman, but there was no mistake as to when they arrived close alongside their expected prey. Flashes of light from the *Leo's* cannon, and sparks of light from the muskets of the man-o'-war's-men, soldiers, and crew aboard of her, were followed by a roar that woke all the slumbering echoes of the ocean.

" Not a shout, not a word, lads," the captain said hoarsely. " Don't fire a shot without my order. We must get aboard in silence, and give

the watch cold steel. Now, my lads, keep together, and—Give way !”

“ Oh ! ain't it glorious ?” muttered Bob, as the cutters leaped through the water.

They ran under the pirate's bows undetected (for the watch were intently listening to the sounds of the conflict raging to starboard), and boarded on the larboard side just by the fore-rigging, Captain Agars being the first to seize one of the chain-plates and clamber to the deck, his crew swarming rapidly after him.

As he scrambled up with the others, it seemed to Bart that he could still see Katie's beautiful blue eyes and the gleaming of her golden hair in the darkness.

Scores of the pirates had remained on board their ship, and many were on deck, but of these the majority were not wearing their arms.

The success of the surprise was complete. Though such of the scoundrels as were armed fought savagely, they were remorselessly cut down or shot down, and a general rush was made below to escape the boarders' furious onslaught. The hatches were clapped on, the few still living ruffians who remained above were quickly disposed of, and the gallant *Hawk's* men were in complete possession. Their commander's first care was to open his prize's cunningly concealed ports and run out her guns in preparation for the proper reception of the boats if they escaped from the brig. That a furious fight was pro-

ceeding was plain enough, but the firing quickly ceased.

“Ready, my men,” said Captain Agars ; “for if any of the boats are returning they’re coming now. Be handy there, Mr. Wilkinson, with the lanterns and torches.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

By and by the splash of hurrying boats was distinctly heard. Judging his distance, Captain Agars suddenly ordered the lanterns to be flashed across the dark water, and all the huge torches he had had prepared to be lit. Two of the pirate boats were plainly visible, rowed close to each other as hard as they could be pulled.

“Now, lads—fire and sink ’em.”

The shot struck home, sinking the leading boat. Screams and oaths and curses arose from her wounded and drowning men. A wild hail was yelled from the other boat.

“No quarter for pirates,” shouted Captain Agars. “Fire !”

A flash, a roar—and down went the second craft.

It was all over. A few of the drowning rascals struck out for the schooner, and were helped aboard—to be saved for hanging.

“Mike Black’ll have some pardners to dance that ’ornpipe in the air with him,” remarked a blue-jacket of a playful turn of mind.

Leaving the majority of his men on board the captured *Serpent*, of which Mr. Wilkinson was

put in charge, Captain Agars was rowed back to the *Leo*.

The casualties on board the brig, to which those amongst the boarders did not seriously add, had been comparatively few, but the victory had not been bloodless. Five of her defenders had been killed and thirteen wounded—one fatally.

“What is the name of my dying midshipman?” asked Captain Agars.

“Mr. Rudge, sir.”

The next morning the prize was signaled from the brig, on board which Mr. Wilkinson proceeded for orders. Captain Agars returned in his place.

“Arber,” he said sorrowfully, “poor Mr. Rudge is dying, and has asked to see you. Go at once.”

The two lads were soon together for the last time. Peter lay in his berth, very calm and very white.

Ah, boys, believe me, Death is so great a thing that in its presence everything else looks small. Everything is seen so differently—both by those who die and those who watch. How insignificant now seemed all the causes for the late ill-will and enmity between the two old schoolfellows.

“Good-bye, Bart,” murmured Peter. “That fight . . . will . . . never be finished . . . now.”

“Oh, don’t talk like that, Peter—don’t talk like that. It—all that, Peter—is finished and over.”

“Yes . . . all . . . is finished and

over. I'm very sorry . . . now . . . for the grudge I bore you. Forgive me . . . Bart."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes. The blame couldn't have been all yours, Peter—it wasn't all yours. Why didn't I try harder to win your good-will? Why wasn't I more forbearing and more forgiving?"

Boys, it is a bitter thing to feel that such regrets as Bart was experiencing now have come *too late*.

Peter Rudge feebly held out his hand. Bart took it and held it gently in both his hands as his old antagonist breathed his last.

Before the breeze came that bore the vessels forward on their now short way, all that was mortal of the dead midshipman was "buried at sea."

The *Leo* and the *Sea Serpent* continued their passage in company for Port Royal. But one more adventure was to befall them. A large frigate was seen to hoist signals of distress, and as the schooner and the brig bore down upon her, what was the general wonder and delight to find that she was the *Vengeur*!

After her fight with the *Hawk*, the storm that sealed the fate of the sloop had played havoc with the frigate also, and in obedience to the formal summons of Captain Agars from the deck of his prize she instantly hauled down her colors.

"May I ask to whom I surrender my sword?" inquired the French commander with grave politeness as the English commander stepped upon his deck.

"I had the honor, sir," replied Captain Agars,

with equal politeness, "to command the since sunken British sloop that fought you a few days ago."

"Then, monsieur," said the Frenchman with a bitter smile, "I surrender my sword to the English *gentleman* who continued to fire upon me after he had struck his colors."

"By Heaven, sir," thundered Agars passionately, "you wrong me. My colors were cut down by a traitor who was about to desert to you or drown himself when he was seized and prevented by an eyewitness of his treachery. The wretch is in irons on board my prize, waiting his trial by court-martial. I would rather have blown up my ship with my own hands than have kept her in action under false pretenses."

"My sword, monsieur. *Prend*," was the short and impetuous reply.

"I will *not* take it, sir. Your surrender I must accept. Your sword I beg you to continue to wear."

CHAPTER XII.

AT PORT ROYAL, JAMAICA.

BART was sorry that he was told off as one of the prize crew of the ex-pirate—because Katie Caines of course remained on her father's vessel.

"I wonder why it is I can't keep her out of my mind," he thought. "I can't make it out at all."

All went well with the three ships, and by and by an eager and anxious lookout was kept for the first sight of land. At last the longed-for cry was raised :

"Land on the lee bow !"

High above the distant line of the horizon shot up the great peak of the Blue Mountains. The next day the ships reached off the eastern end of the Isle of Jamaica. Guns were fired for pilots, who rowed alongside in canoes from a little schooner lying to not far off. These nigger-pilots, with many absurd airs of importance, at once entered upon their duties, and in due time the *Leo*, the *Sea Serpent*, and the *Vengeur* were safely anchored in the waters of Port Royal.

Captain Agars immediately proceeded to report himself to the Admiral in command of the station.

The court-martial required by the rules of the service on account of the loss of the sloop was quickly convened, and its decision quickly made known. This time the poor old *Hawk's* commander was of course exonerated from all blame, and his sword restored to him. He was, further, privately allowed to understand that his next command was likely to be that of something bigger than a sloop. The safe carriage of important dispatches, the seizure of a notorious pirate, and the capture of a French frigate formed a pretty good record, and not a bad off-set for the loss sustained.

Short work was made of the captured pirates—they were all strung up. The prisoners of legitimate war were handed over to the proper authorities. Mike Black remained to be dealt with by a separate court-martial. No one entertained any doubt as to what the verdict and sentence would be; the former was “guilty,” and the latter that he be hung on the following morning from the yard-arm of the ship on board of which he had been confined.

“Poor beggar,” said Bob Simmons to Bart; “I can’t help feeling sorry for him now. But if ever a blackguard deserved such a fate he does.”

“There can’t be any doubt about that,” agreed Bart; “though I can’t help pitying him, either.”

“Well, it won’t take long—that’ll be one comfort for him.”

"Bob," said Bart, changing the subject, "I've written a long letter to my mother, telling her all about our adventures—telling her everything—and I want to find out what ship is likely to be the first to leave here for home, so as to send it by her."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised to find that the first as well as the best ship will be the *Leo*. I know the old man means loading for Bristol again, and I don't see any other vessel as is likely to be forrader than the brig herself. She got under discharge the same day she fetched the port. Let's go aboard her, and make inquiries."

"We will, Bob—now, at once."

The thought that Katie would very likely be on board, and that he might see her, quickened Bart's footsteps, and the brig was soon reached. Katie Caines was not only on board but on deck; and while Bob went below to interview the captain. Bart remained above to interview the captain's daughter. Somehow they found so much to talk about, and got on together so well, that Bob Simons's re-appearance at the end of a quarter of an hour seemed premature.

"You must come to see us again—soon," said Katie to Bart, offering him her hand a little shyly.

"I will," said Bart eagerly.

"The brig'll be ready to sail for Bristol in three weeks," announced Bob as they regained the wharf; "and as there won't be no convoy avail-

able before then, it stands to reason as no ship's likely to sail earlier. So the *Leo's* the ship for your letter."

"Yes," replied Bart; "but I'll keep it till she's ready to sail, so as to add the latest news. I may know my fate before then. What do you think they're going to do with us, Bob?"

"Can't say. We ain't been transferred to no other man-o'-war at present. May be we shan't be transferred at all. I'm sartain sure as Cap'en Agars will keep his word and get us both off if he can—but I don't see how he's a-going to manage it. It's true enough as our 'pressment was illegal—but pressed we were, safe enough, and the Admiralty ain't so partickler as to a unlegal point or two in these here times."

"You forget that we're not pressed men—we volunteered."

"Oh, sart'n'ly," agreed Bob with a grim smile—"we volunteered. Talking o' these here times," he continued, "I was a bit took aback to find as Cap'en Caines had brought that there pretty young darter of his to sea along of him."

"I know all about it. It was the only way to save her life. The doctors all said that to take her on a good sea voyage was the only way to cure her of an illness that she was suffering from, and that was slowly but surely killing her."

"She don't look much like dying now."

"No—she was better before they reached the

Bermudas. The original plan was to leave her there with some friends, but when the time came she wouldn't agree to be left. She insisted on accompanying her father first to Halifax, and then to the West Indies, and for the remainder of the voyage. She felt sure she would only be ill again if she were left ashore anywhere without him. And the doctors said it was very likely she would."

"How d'ye know all this, Master Bart?"

"Katie . . . Miss Caines told me."

Bob Simmons quizzed him from the corner of his eye.

"You've got very . . . sort of confidential together."

"Yes," said Bart shortly. "I say, Bob, do you see that old nigger squatting on the wharf alongside the water there—gazing down into it with all his eyes? He's got a long bright knife in his right hand."

"I see him."

"It seems to me that he sits there day after day and all day long. I've seen him every day since we arrived."

"So have I."

"He's always at the same spot, and there he sits all the time."

"Squats, you mean."

"Well, squats—never taking his eyes from the water and never leaving go his clutch on that long sharp-pointed blade. What's he up to?"

"Let's overhaul him and find out," suggested Simmons as they neared the negro. "Hie there, Sambo!"

"Me not Sambo, man-o'-war buccra. Me Massa Regency Marmalade Maintop. Not polite to call Massa Maintop Sambo. Go 'way. Colored gemman not interfere with white gemmen. Why white man-o'-war gemmen interfere colored gemman? Go 'way. Colored gemman busy. Massa Maintop occupied."

"It was certainly "not polite," of the two "white man-o'-war gemmen" to break into a roar of laughter, but they did so.

"Why, Massa Colored-gemman Regency Marmalade Maintop," cried Bart, "what are you busy at? Fishing?"

"Yes, buccra—me fishing," replied the black-amoor gravely. "Dat is, me wait for fish—one fish, one very big fish."

"Where's your line? Are you fishing without a hook? Where's your bait?"

"Want no line for dis kind of fishing! Hook? Ha, ha! When I see my one very big fish he take him long hook—nebber live any mo'. Bait, you say bait? He got him bait—took him bait one week, two week, t'ree week ago."

"What do you mean, Maintop?"

The nigger rolled two fierce eyes round upon his questioner.

"Me tell you. One week, two week, t'ree week ago my picaninny—my little picaninny—play just

here on the wharf. Shark--one very big shark--wait just d'ere in de water down below. Soon my child--my little piccaninny dat I lub--fall off de wharf, drop into de water. Shark roll on him back, open him great jaw, crunch my poor piccaninny in him big teeth. All de water red wid her blood. Den he swim away. Me hab no mo' de little piccaninny. Ebery day since den, all de day, I wait and wait and wait."

"What do you wait for?" inquired Bart kindly.

"For de shark, massa. Wait wid dis big knife. Shark catch piccaninny here--he get hungry and come here again. So I wait. Dat same shark come back sure. Not many shark come in de harbor now--only dat one big shark been seen for long time, and ebery time he seen him got same one mark on de fin, where he chipped wid hitcher. Me know dat shark when he come, but all de same any o'der shark. He been seen one time, two time, many time since he eat my piccaninny."

"What are ye going to do when you see him?" asked Bob.

Before the black could reply, an extraordinary emotion seemed to seize him. He clutched his dagger-like knife so fiercely that the sinews of his bare right arm stretched. He half rose, and with his weapon poised, hung crouching over the wharf-side. His whole body shook in what appeared to be a spasm of fury, his eyes--fixed on

the water some twenty or thirty yards off—gleaming in a sort of savage ecstasy.

“What’s the matter?” said Bart.

“Look,” replied Bob Simmons, pointing to the spot upon which the negro’s gaze was fixed. There, plainly visible above the surface of the deep, clear water—deep and clear right up to the quay-side—was the fin of a shark, slowly, lazily drawing nearer.

The shark was swimming to the very spot where the poor “piccaninny” had been killed. The huge creature’s body could be seen now, floating nearer and nearer, till it lay almost directly under that uplifted knife.

Head first, the long blade held straight before him, the lost “piccaninny’s” father hurled himself upon the hideous fish, before, warned by his shadow, it could turn itself. He literally flung himself into the water and upon the shark.

Bart raised an affrighted cry as he witnessed that wild leap, and he and Bob Simmons gazed eagerly down upon the scene of the strange fight between man and man-eater. But it was all over in a moment. Already the water was thick with blood, and as the dying shark rolled over they saw the point of the knife sticking through his flesh. The blade, slanting as he commenced to turn, had gone through him near the fin. A few mad plunges, and he was dead.

“Where’s the nigger?” exclaimed Bart, just as the woolly head of Massa Regency Marmalade

Maintop appeared above the surface a little way off. After sticking his game he had dived to avoid attack himself.

"Here I am," he grinned. "Dat shark dead, you t'ink, eh?"

"Quite."

Notwithstanding this assurance he approached very warily the foam and blood-flecked spot where lay his late enemy. Satisfying himself that his victim was indeed beyond the power of retaliation, he swam close up to him.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed joyously, without a trace of his recent passion. "Look here, man-o'-war buccras. Dis de right shark." As he spoke he pointed out the mark of an old injury on the great fish's dorsal fin.

"Well done, old Maintop," shouted Bob approvingly, tossing a shilling to Massa Regency, who caught it dexterously. Bart followed suit, and they turned away.

"T'ank you, massas," was shouted after them. "Massa Maintop t'ank you bofe. Massa Maintop not fish any mo' now—him caught him fish at last. Dis debbil not eat piccaninnies any mo'."

"Well," said Bob Simmons, "I've seen a good many rum things in my life, afloat and ashore, but I'm scuttled if I ever saw such a thing before as a nigger jumping into deep water with a knife to go for a shark. That chap's got pluck, and pluck is pluck in white or black, all the world over."

"There's another thing, Bob, that I think must be much the same in white or black, all the world over."

"What's that, Master Bart?"

"The love of a father for his child."

He spoke sadly, for his thoughts were of *his* father, far away—the father he had left home to find and save. Was he not more distantly removed from him than ever? How was he to get free—free to prosecute the filial duty he had set himself to accomplish? How was he to get away from the West Indies to the far Pacific? How reach Sydney from Port Royal? Nay, he was even farther from Australia than Jamaica was, for was he not in the King's Navy? Captain Agars would keep his word, but would he succeed in his kindly endeavor? As yet they—he and his faithful ally Bob Simmons—had heard nothing. Bob divined the nature of his thoughts.

"Cheer up, Bart," he said. "Keep your pecker up, sir. Remember you did ought to be thankful that you've met Cap'en Caines, and ha' got his good will and his willin' evidence. Cheer up, my hearty."

"You're right, Bob. I *will* keep my pluck up."

Before they turned in that night the news had spread all over the fleet that Captain John Agars had been appointed to the provisional command of the *Ajax*, one of the largest, finest, and most powerful frigates under the Admiral's flag.

Bob was in ecstasies of delight.

"I'm very glad too," said Bart, "to hear of our old captain's good fortune. He's a brave man, and a kind and good man, and deserves his luck."

"There's more in it than you seem to twig," rejoined his friend. "This is good news for you and me as well as for him."

"How do you mean?"

"Just this way. The captain's promotion to the quarter-deck of a first-class frigate shows that he's in high favor again. The higher the favor he's held in the more chance he's got of getting us our discharge."

"I didn't see that."

"No, but I did. He'll put our case before the Admiral all ship-shape, depend on it; and any hour we may be out o' the King's sarvice. Not as I don't like it exactly—only what do a peaceable man like me want aboard a fighting ship?"

"I say, Bob, how deceived the Frenchman and those pirates must have been in you," remarked Bart after a pause.

"Now then—what d'ye mean by that?"

"Only that I'm afraid they must have taken you to be a fighting man!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MIKE'S STARTLING CONFESSION.

THE next morning Michael Black was hung from the fore-yard-arm of one of the vessels of war.

Before his body was lowered, Bart Arber received a summons from Captain Caines to repair immediately on board the *Leo*.

With a grave and earnest face, Caines received him in his own cabin.

"Arber," he said, "I have something of the greatest importance to communicate to you. Sit down."

Bart did as he was bidden, and waited in silence to hear what the other had to say.

"Last night the man who was hanged this morning begged to be allowed to see Captain Agars. Soon after the commencement of their interview Captain Agars sent for me, and I was present during all the rest of it. Actuated probably by a mad hope of saving his neck at the last moment, and partly by the false penitence that the most wicked of men—mistaking fear for repentance—frequently experience or profess in the

imminence of death, the convicted man made a strange confession of a former crime. That confession most closely concerns yourself, for it practically clears up the mystery surrounding your father's innocence."

Bart sprang to his feet.

"Sit down, my lad, and listen quietly."

Without a word Bart resumed his seat.

"Holding out no hopes that anything he might reveal would avail to affect his own fate, we reduced his confession to writing. In the presence of the chaplain, Captain Agars, and myself, the written statement, after being read over to him word by word, was signed by the wretched man's own hand, our signatures attesting his in due form."

"This statement—this confession that proves my father's innocence—where is it, sir?—where is it?" cried Bart, holding out his trembling hand.

"In the keeping, for the present, of Captain Agars. Go at once aboard the *Ajax*."

The boy needed no second telling. Within a few minutes he stood in the presence of the newly-created captain of the frigate, who, with but few words, placed before him Mike Black's startling confession, of which the body was as follows.

"In the year 1802 I was in the employ of the firm of Messrs. Stencil, Krooks, and Whittoe, of the City of London. I was chiefly engaged in the load-

ing and unloading of the barges and other small vessels that arrived alongside their wharf near the Tower.

“The manager of the firm’s City office in Thames Street was one Jacob Melling. I had not been long at work before an understanding existed and was carried into practise between Jacob Melling and myself, by which I at the wharf and he at the office robbed our employers and shared the proceeds. I stole goods and he falsified the accounts. I afterwards discovered that he was at the same time doing what he had been doing for years—that is to say, apart from his arrangement with me, he was embezzling the moneys of the house on his own account, and on a larger scale.

“Some time about the month of November of the year I have named, Jacob Melling came to me one night and told me that he was in desperate straits for several hundreds of pounds immediately, in order to conceal his defalcations. Unless he succeeded in getting possession quickly of the money he needed, discovery was at last certain. He claimed my help under the threat that if I refused it he would, when himself arrested, divulge the fact of my participation in one part of his fraudulent malpractices. Upon my representing that it was out of my power to do anything to help him where so large an amount was involved, he unfolded the following scheme :

“One of the provincial firms with which Stencil, Krooks, and Whittoe did an extensive business

was the old house of Farrars', of Norwich and Yarmouth. A representative of Messrs. Farrar was in London collecting accounts for them. This representative, a Mr. William Arber, had already received for their account, Melling knew, something like a thousand pounds. Melling had himself paid him, largely in notes, between four and five hundred pounds on behalf of Messrs. Stencil, Krooks, and Whittoe.

"Mr. Arber was about to return. What must be done must be done quickly. That which must be done was to rob him of his funds before it was too late.

"Our plans were quickly formed and carried out the very next night.

"Melling and I had the keys of a lonely house just beyond the eastern boundary of London, in the Romford Road, on the other side of Stratford Church. In this house we used to store the goods I stole from the wharf. To this house we decoyed our victim, drugged and struck him. Melling possessed himself of all his notes and gold.

"Inside the coat the traveler was wearing we stitched one or two of the former, with the object of diverting suspicion. All the rest of his money we kept. Our hope was that he would be himself accused of robbing his employers.

"The deed so far accomplished, we dragged the unconscious man from the house and threw him into the road. A hackney coach approaching before we could escape, we boldly called the driver's

attention to the injured man, and drove him to London Hospital, where we left him, stating that we had found him in the highway insensible and apparently hopelessly under the influence of liquor.

“Some short time afterwards we heard of his apprehension, and then of his trial and conviction on the charge of having embezzled the money we stole from him.

“The crime of which Jacob Melling was the instigator, and in the actual commission of which he was the principal party, did not long stave off the day of discovery. An accident revealed the long-continued and flagrant dishonesty of his accounts. He was arrested and I fled, and have never seen him since. When arrested, he shot at an officer of the law, inflicting a wound which did not prove fatal. He was tried, got off with his life, but was sentenced to transportation.”

Bart could scarcely speak.

“Thank God,” he murmured—“thank God for this fresh light.”

He remembered that only yesterday he had found himself repining at having been taken so far out of his course for Australia. But in all that had happened, had there not been a purpose infinitely wise and infinitely kind? Through all the darkness, had not the Hand of God been leading him all the while? And, of a surety, that Hand—the Hand of One “too wise to err,

too good to be unkind," would lead and guide him still. Was not the way immediately before him clearing already? For what was Captain Agars saying to him?

"Various circumstances have assisted me in the object of the representations I put before the Admiral in fulfilment of my promise. You and Robert Simmons are to receive your discharges."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

"No need to ask me to take your letter now," said the master of the *Leo*—"you can take it yourself."

"On your ship, I hope, captain?" said Bart brightly.

"Certainly."

Bart hesitated for just a moment, and then spoke out. He knew that if he sailed as one of the crew he would be very much farther removed from Katie during the whole passage than he would be as a passenger.

"If you don't mind, sir, I won't ask you to take me as a hand but as a passenger. I have a little money of my own, and my share of prize-money is more than I thought it would be. I can well afford to pay for my passage."

"My young friend, you are the son of one of my oldest friends, and your place is in my cabin—though your name will not figure on the brig's accounts," he added with a smile.

"You are very good to take me, sir, and I shall be very, very glad to come with you. If I could

reach Australia direct from here, I should try to do so ; but as I must return to England before I can ship for the other side of the world, I would so much rather sail with you than with anybody else. But about my faithful friend, Bob Simmons ? I mustn't part company with him, for he sticks to his determination to accompany me to Australia."

"A better fellow you couldn't have with you. You need have no fear of losing him so far as the trip home is concerned, for, as he too is freed from the King's service, he can join the ship when he likes.

"Thank you again, Captain Caines. And now, sir," he said very earnestly, "I want to ask your advice. I am still resolved to find my father and speak to him with my own lips—hear his story in its completeness from his lips. But since I first made up my mind, months ago, to go to him, I have met you, and know that I may rely upon your help and support. Then there is Black's confession, which throws a new light upon the whole case of the crime of which my father was falsely accused and falsely convicted. How shall I act, sir ?"

"I have thought everything over very carefully, Bart, and it seems to me that your course—I will say our course, for I am with you heart and soul—is clear. In the first place, follow the instinct of your own filial heart and—if you find when you again meet your mother that still no word has reached her from your father—go to him. In the

meantime you must leave me Michael Black's dying statement, and trust me to make out the best case that can be constructed from it and the statements that I am myself prepared to swear to. It appears to me that a strong claim can be substantiated for the King's Pardon, for Black's accomplice, having, according to our information, been condemned to suffer a probably life-long sentence, can be found without difficulty."

"The King's Pardon! Pardon for what? If we can prove father's innocence, what is there to pardon?"

"You don't understand. A man cannot, in English law, be tried twice for the same offense. My poor old friend, having been tried once and pronounced guilty, cannot—whatever the facts coming to light subsequently—be tried again in order that he may be pronounced innocent. When a convicted man is found afterwards to be innocent, he is 'pardoned' for what it has been shown he didn't do, and released 'without a stain upon his character.' Before you can reach Port Jackson I will have set the proper machinery in motion on shore."

Bart thanked him with a full heart. When next he appeared on board, he had discarded his seafaring attire, and was dressed as an ordinary civilian of his age and station. Katie's quick eyes noted with approval the alteration in his appearance, which was, indeed, from the "society" point of view, rather striking.

The *Ajax* being ordered to Bermuda, both Bart and Simmons went on board before she sailed, to pay their respects to Captain Agars for the last time.

He received them, and parted from them, very kindly ; wished Bart as speedy a realization of his hopes as might be, and both of them good luck.

By this time the *Leo* was rapidly filling with her homeward freight, and soon after the period that Bob had prophesied was ready for sea.

But a serious difficulty arose about the convoy. There were very few merchantmen either ready or loading—so few, even all together, that convoy was refused until the number to be convoyed should be increased. Several vessels were expected to arrive. When these had arrived, discharged and loaded again, convoy for all the homeward-bound ships would be available, but not before.

This, to Captain Caines, was a grave disappointment, and one that landed him in considerable perplexity. The delay meant that he would "lose his market." The goods he had loaded with would be worth much less if he failed to land them within an early period. Again, the vessels for which he was to wait would certainly load with some of the same goods—if they all arrived in England at the same time, down would drop the prices still further on account of the big supply.

On the other hand, if he sailed without convoy

and were taken, his Insurance Policy would be void.

Day after day passed, even week after week—still no news of the anxiously expected merchantmen.

At last he would have run all risks and sailed without protection—as he had done many a time before—but for one thing: the thought of his daughter. How would she fare if the ship were taken by the French or Spaniards?

Strange to say, it was thought of, and for Katie, that finally decided him to do the very thing that it at first hindered him from doing—that is, make the run without convoy.

As she had told Bart, Kate Caines had been ordered to sea as probably the only means of saving her life. At sea she had soon regained her health, but now the climate of Jamaica was telling upon her. Day by day she was becoming weaker and worse, until she was threatened with utter prostration. Then her father realized that the alternative of the dangers he feared for her at sea was the worse and more imminent danger of losing her where she was.

He hesitated no longer. The word was passed to prepare to sail immediately—"Homeward Bound."

The effect was electrical. Excitement and bustle took the place of apathy and inertness. The eager sailors whistled, sang, even danced in delight, and could scarcely have been identified

with the listless fellows they had been for weeks before. The very ship herself, as her cables rattled and her white sails were shaken out, seemed to have become a thing of life, and to have caught something of the spirit of wild elation that filled the beating hearts she was to bear across the main.

Bart never forgot that passage home. Every day of it, every night, was treasured in his memory. Before the brig's first week at sea, Katie had already begun to recover again. The light came back to her eyes, the color to her fair cheeks. She soon prettily disdained all her special privileges as an invalid—and the special attentions she had accepted in that capacity from the devoted Bart. But when she was able to face the spray and the breeze again, he saw more of her than ever. Either in the cabin or beneath the awning of a sail on deck, they were almost always together. They walked together and talked together and read together.

Katie had never known a mother.

“Tell me of yours,” she used to say.

And then Bart would tell her of that gentle mother whose sorrows had whitened her hair, but had not hardened her gentle heart nor robbed her tender face of its sweetness: the mother to whom he was hastening: the mother who, he knew, breathed his name always when she folded those patient hands of hers at the hour of her morning and evening prayers.

"I, too," said Katie very softly—"I don't forget. I pray for you, for her—for your father."

Her hand was very close to Bart's as she spoke. He took it very gently between his strong fingers, and raised it for a moment to his lips—as a loving brother might have done.

When the voyage was about half over, his birthday came round. He was seventeen.

How he had grown since his last birthday—how many things had happened since his last birthday!

He was a schoolboy then—he felt himself almost a man now. He was taller and broader and stronger; and he was conscious that since he had known Katie something had crept into his life that hadn't been there before—something that as yet he could not understand, but which he felt was becoming very dear and very precious.

Captain Caines congratulated him on the anniversary. So did Bob Simmons, with whom Bart's handshake was at least as hearty as it was with the former.

"There's only one thing in the natur' of a present as I can offer ye, Master Bart," said Bob bashfully, "and that same I don't like for to name, not knowing if yet acceptable, though you sart'n'ly have growed wonderful."

"How can that matter, one way or the other?" Bart replied. "What is this present that you seem so doubtful about?"

"Well, it's just this way. I've got a few

pounds o' baccy which for flaviour and real juicy chawing . . ."

"No, thanks, Bob," laughed the seventeen-year-old ; "I've done without the 'flaviour' of tobacco so far."

And Katie ? What did she say ? What did she give him ?

She said only a few words—but he never forgot them. She offered him but a little present—only years afterwards he would have died rather than have parted with it.

She gave him her own little ivory-bound Prayer-book. He tried to thank her, but he didn't make much of a speech.

"Write in it," he said at last ; "write at least your name, here on the fly-leaf."

She took a pen and wrote.

"From Katie . . ." *Caines* she was going to add, but he stayed her hand.

"Don't," he said.

So those were the only words—"From Katie."

All went well with the good ship till towards the end of the passage. Another week would bring her, it was hoped, within sight of the white cliffs of old England.

But alas ! near the close of a lovely June day, Captain Caines found himself hotly chased by a vessel which he had too good reason to fear was a French privateersman. A stiffish breeze was blowing from the south, but he crowded on canvas till the *Leo* literally staggered under her weight

aloft. Over and over again she buried her bows as she leaped through the foaming surge. Mr. Preece looked anxiously up at her creaking spars—Caines seemed to have no eyes save for the dreaded privateer astern. His lips set, and his face grew almost pale, as the progress of the race showed but too plainly that all the advantage was on the side of the enemy. She was gaining, steadily, surely—even rapidly gaining. If the race continued much longer it could have only one result, for the heavily-laden brig was no match for her pursuer. Already the latter was keeping up a running fire, though as yet her shots fell wide or short. As for fighting, it was out of the question—the privateer could have knocked the brig to pieces.

“God hasten the night,” groaned Captain Caines.

That was his only hope now—that night would fall before he was within gunshot. In the darkness he might escape, though even that chance was a small one. But small as it was—“God send the night quickly ! ”

When darkness fell there was scarcely more than two knots between the two ships.

Bart had watched the mad race with a sinking heart. Suddenly an idea struck him. It was no time to stand upon ceremony, and he communicated it at once without apology.

“Captain Caines,” he exclaimed, “let me tell you the dodge that has occurred to me. Of course you won’t show any lights on the brig to-night

—but what if we show a false light? Suspend a lantern, sir, over an empty cask. Heave the cask overboard and let it drift before the wind, while we make in another direction.”

He received no thanks—just then. But the decoy was quickly prepared and set adrift. The topgallant-sails were taken in, and the brig was hauled to the wind on the starboard tack, even under her reduced sail laying her lee bulwarks under upon this point of sailing.

Through the darkness she plunged on in the direction of the distant coast of Spain. All on board felt that she was only running from a certain into an uncertain danger, for would not the course she was holding soon bring her into the waters where Spanish cruisers were likely to be seeking just such prey? But the paramount idea was to escape from the privateer at all hazards.

“Will you ease her of her top-s’ls now, sir?” asked Mr. Preece.

“No, Mr. Preece; I will not ease her of a stitch. That privateer may be deceived for a time by our artifice—she may follow that floating light till she finds out her mistake. But the more time we make sure of gaining the greater our chance of ultimate escape. The brig must carry every rag she’s under.”

“Very good, sir.”

With every hour the wind freshened. Straining and quivering, on and on careered the *Leo* in the black night.

"It's blowing a gale, sir," said the mate at midnight.

"Let it blow. Her sticks will hold."

An hour later Mr. Preece ventured to make one more attempt—his last.

"It's blowing harder than ever, sir. I'm afraid she *cannot* carry her present press of sail."

"She must and she shall, sir," insisted the captain. "Do you understand, man," he cried angrily, "what I have at stake? Do you know what I lose if I fail to get out of the reach of those rascals before daylight?—ship, cargo, liberty—the greater portion of the wealth that I have toiled for for years, and all chance of enjoying the rest till the doors of French prison-houses are thrown open. More than ship, more than cargo, wealth, liberty—aye, more than life—*my daughter is aboard*. What better than a pirate is many a privateer?"

Just before dawn lights were made out ahead. Almost at the same moment the brig's fore-top-sail split, and her main-sail went with a loud report. Hands lay aloft to pick up the fragments of the sails, but before their work was done daylight broke.

The French privateer was nowhere in sight, but lying-to to windward, appallingly close, was a huge line-of-battle ship, with the dreaded colors of Spain fluttering at her peak!

Poor Captain Caines was unmanned at last. He gave one despairing glance at his crippled,

rigging and hid his face for a moment in his hands.

"Lost, lost," he moaned—"all lost."

The Spaniard fired a gun—the meaning of the signal was known too well.

Calm now, but very pale, Caines faced round.

"God's will be done," he said.

The Union Jack was run up—and dipped in token of surrender.

Another gun from the great bows of the line-of-battle ship.

"Back the main-top-s'l."

It was not till the wind moderated that the Spaniards were seen preparing to lower a boat in order to take possession of their prize. The boat was launched, the crew took their places, and an officer in gay uniform followed them.

As the cutter pushed off, the crew of the *Leo* mustered forward in grim and surly silence. Aft stood Captain Caines and his officers, with Bart and Katie.

Nearer and nearer approached the cutter. Just before she reached alongside an incident occurred that afforded an apt illustration of the fact that tragedy and comedy, the sad and the ludicrous, follow very closely in each other's footsteps sometimes in this strange world of ours.

"What is that commotion for'rud there?" asked Captain Caines sternly.

Bob Simmons answered, stepping aft as he did so.

"It's me, sir. I'm a peaceable man, Cap'en Caines, but I refuse to submit to that cutterful of Spaniards without a fight. One fight, sir, entirely on my own account, is all I ask—one fight before they take us all to chokey."

Up the side stepped the Spanish lieutenant, and on to the brig's deck. He gave a look of surprise fore and aft, and moved to Captain Caines with a flourishing salute of his cocked hat.

"Señor, you are captain of this breeg?"

"I am. I wear no sword, sir, so have none to offer you. My ship is a peaceful trader."

"Señor, the English captain, why have you talk of your sword? I have not said of swords. Why are your men all togeddar so? It is all strange."

"Be careful how you mock me, sir—prisoner though I am."

"Let me get at him—or give me one go at the cutter's crew," said a well-known voice. Its struggling owner was held back by his messmates.

"Prisonaire!" exclaimed the Spanish officer in a tone of mystification. "This breeg is English?" he added quickly. "Then . . ."

All at once a light seemed to break upon him.

"I see it! I see it! I see it!" he cried. "Ha! ha! but it is good. You have said of your sword—you have said you are prisonaire—you have say to yourself I come to take possession. Ha! you do not know, Señor, England and Spain fight each other no longer. No more are we enemies, but

friends for ever. Señor the English captain, since you have been at sea a Treaty of Peace is signed between your country and mine I board your breeg only to ask you are you putting into a Spanish port? If so, of your kindness will you carry some letters from my ship?"

It was quite true. Early in the month Napoleon had proclaimed his brother Joseph King of Spain. The Spaniards had immediately declared war against their recent allies the French, and had concluded an "everlasting" alliance with England.

It would not be easy to describe the effect of the revulsion of feeling on board the *Leo* as the situation was realized. A minute ago nothing seemed left but the inside of an enemy's prison for every soul on board—and now, "would they of their kindness carry some letters?"

Captain Caines carried off the courteous Spaniard—much more affable and less haughty than most of his countrymen of the official class—down into his cabin, whence they both emerged presently looking beaming and radiant.

As for the crew, they burst into cheer after cheer. They cheered their ship, their captain, and themselves. Then they cheered the Spanish line-of-battle ship, and all Spanish ships, and all Spaniards. They compelled the crew of the cutter to come up and fraternize with them, threatening to "punch their heads" if they wouldn't come on deck and be friends. The threatened Spaniards

understood the gestures accompanying the incomprehensible words.

Looking at Katie's face, Bart was irresistibly reminded of a rainbow—the sunshine of happiness glowed upon it after the rain of her tears.

Under a salute of such ringing cheers as only the throats of British sailors are capable of, the cutter returned to the Spanish battle-ship.

The shifting of the *Leo's* sails was proceeded with with alacrity, and soon she was all trim. Then again she sped away on her course for Old England, which she reached without further adventure, anchoring safely one beautiful summer afternoon in the Bristol roads. The next morning she got alongside.

"Bart," said Captain Caines, "you are anxious to go to your mother first of all. Go, my lad."

"Aye, aye, sir. I will go to her, tell her all—tell her of our plans. Then, before I journey on to Australia, . . ."

"Write to me."

"No, sir. I'll return to Bristol and see you : before you sail again."

"Better still. What about Simmons?"

"He's agreed to come on to Gorleston with me."

Bart's traps were soon packed, and Bob went on ahead with them to the hotel from which the coach started. Our hero descended to the captain's cabin to say good-by. His warm-hearted words of thanks for all the kindness he had received were cut short with sailor-like brusqueness.

“Very well, captain. Then—for the present—good-by, sir.”

“Good-by—and remember my message to your mother. I’ll see you to the gangway,” said Captain Caines, rising. But Bart stammered, hesitated, and actually blushed—though little could be seen of his blushes through the light mahogany tan of his skin. Caines looked at him with amazement.

“Thank you very much for the compliment, Captain Caines, but . . .”

“But what?” was the blankly put question.

“But Miss Katie . . .”

“Well?”

“Is waiting for me on deck.”

Kate’s father looked the youngster fair and square in the face.

“Oh!” was his only remark as he resumed his seat.

Kate and Bart said good-by very much after this fashion.

“Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

“Good-by, Katie.”

“Good-by. You’ll lose the coach.”

“Yes. Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

“Good-by. You know I shall see you again before the *Leo* sails on her next voyage?”

“Yes.”

“Good-by, Katie.”

“Good-by, Bart.”

CHAPTER XV.

HOME !

MRS. ARBER sits close to the open window of her sitting-room on the cliff at Gorleston.

The afternoon air is full of sunshine. It falls upon her white hair, her pale, bowed face, her folded hands. But there is no sunshine in her heart.

The warm air is full of music. There is music in the rhythmical sobbing of the sea as its tears lave the sands below. The trees are full of soft sounds as the gentle breeze rustles their leafy branches. A lark is singing above—not far above, for the earth is so fair to-day that he has come a little lower to finish “his sweet singing.” And nearer that open window,

“The throat of the thrush is a pulse in the heart.”

Music above, below, around—but there is no music in her heart.

On the table before her lies Bart's letter—the only letter she has received from him since he left her ; the letter he wrote her from London

telling her that he had shipped on the *Blue-bell* for Port Jackson.

Closer to her still is a newspaper that reached her an hour ago. Written in that paper—and burnt into her heart forever—are these lines, supplemented by a few others referring to the latitude and longitude :

“Information has been received at Lloyd’s of the total loss of the barque Blue-bell, W. Swift, master, London for Port Jackson, New South Wales. All hands have perished.”

Lines small in number—great in the load of anguish they bear with them to the tender, long-suffering heart they crush—the anguish of a bereavement too heavy to be borne.

A step behind her—but the stricken mother does not turn her weary eyes. The touch of a strong hand upon her head—then the clasp of two loving arms around her neck.

Bart—big and broad and bonny and brave—alive and well : Bart has come home !

Shine away, sun. Sing away, sea and trees and birds.

Shine away ! Sing away ! There is sunshine in mother’s heart now, music in every nook and corner of it now.

Bart has come home !

Part II.**CHAPTER XVI.**

CONVICT NUMBER 2,703.

DECEMBER the twenty-fifth—Christmas Day, 1808—was a never-forgotten date in the memory of Bartholomew Arber, for on it he and his faithful chum Mr. Robert Simmons landed at last in Australia after a pleasant but uneventful passage.

Stepping ashore with as little delay as possible from the vessel that had carried them safely across thirteen thousand miles of salt water, they proceeded to enter the sun-dried streets of Sydney.

“Just the same, just the same,” muttered Bob in a tone of disgust as he looked round him.

“What do you mean?” asked Bart, who was bewildered by the rough demeanor of the people through whom they were making their way.

“This is the third time I’ve been in this place,” was the reply; “and the state of things is just the same now as ’twas the first time and the second time I was here—Grog-shops and drunk-

ards on every hand. Where you find grog-shops, Bart, you'll find drunkards, and where you find drunkards you'll find vice and crime and dirt and disease. Such places and such people and such things are all mixed up together. Come on ; let's get out of this, and find our way to the quiet quarters I told you about. Keep alongside."

"Aye, aye, Bob."

They had not proceeded far, however, before Simmons, laying a quick hand on Bart's arm, pulled up short.

"What's the matter ? "

"Look, look," answered the sailor, pointing excitedly to a fat little undersized man who was waddling along towards them on the opposite side of the street, with a big parcel under his arm. "Look at him !"

"What about him ? I see him—who is he ?"

"I'll soon show you who he is. It is him—I'm scuttled if it isn't, though he carries about four times his old tonnage. Just you watch."

Bob Simmons, rounding his fingers, held his two hands in front of his mouth, and gave vent to some unearthly sounds in imitation of the blowing of a trumpet or other wind instrument, keeping his eyes fixed on the fat little stranger opposite, who stopped and gazed round him inquiringly.

"Poet ahoy !" roared Bob. "Faggles !"

There was no mistaking where such a voice came from. The hailee glared at the hailer. Bart glared at them both.

"Faggles ahoy !" shouted Bob again.

The man with a parcel continued to stare across at him without giving any sign of recognition. But suddenly it came. His look of blank astonishment became all at once intensified. His eyes opened wide, and his jaw fell ; his brown-paper package dropped to the ground. He was more bewildered on recognizing who had hailed him as the "poet Faggles" than he had been on being hailed.

"Lie to, and we'll come alongside."

Followed by Bart, Bob Simmons quickly crossed the road, and shook Faggles heartily by the hand.

"Simmons !" gasped the latter.

"Simmons it is, my hearty. Where's that cornet-ar-piston ?"

"What have you done with that barrel-organ ?" retorted the other with a grin.

Bart suddenly remembered—this stranger could be no other than his friend's old rival. As he thought of the serenade episode in "Bob Simmons's Love Story," he broke into a laugh.

"This here young gennelman is a friend of mine," explained Bob, "and we've just landed from England on some particular private business of his."

"Glad to know you, sir," said Faggles.

"And I'm glad to know any friend of my friend," said Bart.

"What are you doing in the colony, Faggles ?" inquired Bob.

“Doing very well,” was the answer. “I’ve got a store—chiefly drapery. Come on, and I’ll take you to it. Of course it’s closed to-day for business, but always open to friends from the old country.”

“What about the pome-trade?” asked Simmons, as the three walked along.

“The shop of the Muses, sir,” answered the little draper solemnly, “is closed forever, as far as I’m concerned. The shutters are up. The want of appreciation with which I had to contend, sir, is incredible. I wrote poems of every sort and every size. Was there a rush for them, sir? No, sir—there was not a rush for them. I lost my situation at Whitby simply through just asking a lady-customer to wait while I finished a sonnet I was working off, or to call again in an hour or two. Thrown on my own resources, . . . ”

“Beam-ends,” remarked Bob explanatorily.

“Thrown on my own resources,” repeated Faggles, “I resolved to embark on poetry as a business. I filled as many sheets of paper, Mr. Simmons, as my capital allowed me to purchase. Would anybody buy my poems, sir? No, sir—nobody would buy them, though I grew my hair as long as any other poet. Not a single buyer ever turned up—though I played it as low down at last as quoting three ha’pence a-dozen, or seven and ninepence three farthings to clear out the lot. Simmons, what did I do? I’ll tell you. I abandoned my communion with the Muse of Poesy—in other words, I chucked it up. My relations and special

friends—to all of whom I made it a point to send immediate copies of all I wrote—clubbed together and offered to pay my passage to Australia on the understanding that I never communicated with them again and never returned. I accepted their offer and have complied with their conditions.

“I came here, started in a small way, and have got on. Here we are,” he concluded, as they reached a large store.

“Well, Faggles, good luck to ye,” said Bob. “I’m glad to know that one business has paid better than the other.”

“We’ll get in by the back way,” remarked Faggles, opening a side door. “There’s no water-butt in the yard, Bob Simmons,” he added significantly.

Just as they were about to enter the house, Bob laid a heavy hand on Faggles’ shoulder.

“I say, mate—not to remind each other too much of old times, but—are you spliced—married, I mean, you know?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Glad to hear it.”

“Are you?”

“No, I ain’t.”

“*Glad to hear it.*”

“Eh?”

“Wait till you see Mrs. F. You’ll understand my feelings better then.”

In “Mrs. F.” the two visitors beheld a tall, gaunt, angular lady with a determined face, to

whom her husband introduced them with considerable diffidence.

"My dear," he said, "two old friends of mine from the Old Country—at least, one old friend and one new friend, but both from the Old Country."

"Faggles," was his spouse's only immediate response, "*where is that parcel?*"

In his excitement, the unfortunate little man had forgotten to re-possess himself of it after letting it drop upon the pathway. He was instantly packed off to find and bring it back.

"Mind you don't return without it," was Mrs. Faggles's warning as he shot off. It was only after his departure that she took the slightest notice of the visitors he had presented to her.

"You can't think the trouble I have with that man," she abruptly observed, "to keep him up to the scratch. If it wasn't for me the business would fall into ruin and he'd fall into rhyming again. I have to keep my eye on everything."

That her intentions were hospitable and more amiable than her manners was proved by the fact that she instantly began to load the table heavily with good things to eat. By the time the meal was ready Faggles returned. Happily for him, he had succeeded in recovering the parcel.

Having had nothing but ship's fare for several months, both Bart and Bob relished the eatables and drinkables to which they sat down. The

repat was crowned with a genuine English Christmas pudding.

"Where are your traps?" demanded the hostess suddenly.

"We decided to leave 'em aboard, ma'am," answered Bob Simmons, "while we maneuvered around to find some quiet comfortable quarters. We were heading for a street where I stayed once when we fell in with the master here."

"Master, indeed!" snorted Mrs. Faggles; adding, "well, now you've found quarters you'd better go down to the ship while I clear away, and bring up your traps. I'll send the 'master' with you to help carry 'em here—he's no use at home."

"Mrs. Faggles," remonstrated Bart, "we really couldn't think of intruding upon you . . ."

"Don't think, then," snapped the lady. "Do it."

Mr. Faggles feebly joined in by remarking that of course they would stop at "their" house—he dared not say "his" while his wife was in the room—during their sojourn in the neighborhood.

Bart was still inclined to demur, for it was evident that no idea of payment entered into the thoughts of either Mrs. or Mr. Faggles; but Bob, acquainted with the free and easy "laws of hospitality" ruling in a new country, took it upon himself to accept for the two of them the cordial, though rough and ready, invitation they had received.

So host and guests went off to bring the luggage from the ship to the house. Bob's expectation that they would have to carry it themselves because "every lubber about the place would be too busy getting drunk to look out for a job on Christmas-day" was realized.

When they got back to the store, tea was steaming on the table. The evening meal was followed by a pleasant spell of conversation, and at an early hour all retired to rest.

When Bart knelt by the side of his clean white bed that night to pray, he first, before offering up his petitions for further help and guidance, thanked the Great Father for having brought him safely to the scene of his far search. With a fervent heart he poured out his gratitude, and asked for grace to face pluckily and bear bravely all that might be before him on the morrow and in the days to follow.

For some time he could not sleep. The excitement of the ever-present thought that at last he was in the very place to which his father had been transported—the thought that to-morrow he might see him, at least would hear of him—kept open his eyes, tired though he was.

But at length came thoughts of his mother and of Katie—he remembered that their prayers were following him wherever he went, that their petitions for the success of his mission blended with his own. The prayers of his mother and his sweetheart—God would hear and answer them ;

it was so short a distance from their pure hearts to the Throne of Grace.

"God's will be done—it is all in His hands," he murmured, as his weary eyelids shut and he fell asleep.

Soon after breakfast the next morning, accompanied by Bob Simmons, he set off for his all-important interview with the Governor. On their way they came upon a gang of road convicts. Bart shuddered and halted as his eyes traveled from face to face—every face so hideous with the stigma of crime and villainy and inhuman punishment. He trembled and turned pale as the sound of the clanking chains around the prisoners' manacled limbs entered his ears and pierced his heart.

"Could his father—his dear father—be . . . ?"

But Bob seized him firmly by the arm.

"No, no," he said, as he hurried the poor lad on.

Bart found it was yet far too early for him to be permitted to present his letters of introduction. He waited with feverish impatience till the fateful hour arrived when he had been told the Governor might receive him.

"I'll wait for you outside, Master Bart."

"No, Bob—truest and best and bravest of friends. You've stuck by me all along, and now you must come with me and hear with me at once the best or the worst."

"Aye, aye, Bart—as you wish it, I'll keep alongside."

The Governor received courteously, though with official coldness and dignity, the two well-dressed strangers ushered into his presence. Bob Simmons, on the insistence of Bart and Mrs. Arber, had for once crossed the seas as a passenger, and in his neat, well-made plain clothes looked more like a prosperous master-mariner in mufti than a poor "common sailor."

Both Captain Agars and Captain Caines had been as good as their promises, and the influential letters of introduction handed to the Governor by Bart not only stated the object of the latter's journey, but gave plain, full particulars of the whole case as it at present stood, mentioning particularly the steps that were being taken at the time the letters were written to secure a re-opening of the original case, in the hope of obtaining the King's Pardon.

The Governor read slowly and carefully. Then he ordered the attendance of a subordinate official and instructed him to supply at once all the information desired by the two applicants before him.

Bowing themselves from the presence of the Governor they followed his subordinate to his office. The interview was short, for the underling was more brusque and less courteous than his chief.

"Arber, William," he said sharply, opening a ponderous reference book ; "hereafter called Convict 2,703."

"He is my father, sir," said Bart with a flushed face.

"Convict 2,703," repeated the other without an atom of sympathy in his voice. He kept his finger on the open page before him, and appeared partly to quote from it.

"Convict 2,703. Was received here October 29th, 1803—sentence, fourteen years—particulars of crime, you don't want—other particulars, you don't want—conduct, good—never punished or reported Here's what you want—*released on Ticket-of-Leave, November 1st, 1805.*"

"Released!" cried Bart.

"On Ticket-of-Leave."

"Where is he? Where did he go? Where is he?"

Another reference was turned to, and the harsh, dry voice continued:

"Settled up country. Reports himself from Digg's Gully, Woonga Station. Good morning."

But Bart had not finished his inquiries yet. There was Jacob Melling to ask after.

With an impatient gesture the official opened another book, after an apparently unsuccessful reference to the first.

"Melling, Jacob. Never reached the settlement. The transport on which he was shipped was burnt at sea, and Melling—Jacob—was drowned or burnt with it. Good morning."

"Bob," said Bart Arber to his chum very ear-

nestly later on, "we have found that my father arrived here, and that he is alive. We have found where he is, and that Woonga Station is only about a hundred and fifty miles up country. The fate of Jacob Melling destroys all hope of adding, as a link in the chain of evidence, anything that could have been extorted from him in confirmation of Black's confession—but that part—I mean proving beyond doubt or cavil poor father's innocence—that part of the work on which I have set my heart and my soul I can do nothing more to further until we have met—my father and I. We'll start for Digg's Gully to-morrow—and only to-morrow because we can't start to-night. But there's one thing we can do at once."

"I know what you mean. We can start buying what we shall want to carry and what we shall want to carry us."

"Yes—horses . . ."

"When you make mention of that *word* 'horses,' Master Bart, you make mention of almost all I know about horses—for the word's just about all I do know of 'em. Now as for the other things we must buy—arms, blankets, camping rig-out . . ."

"I tell you what then, Bob," interrupted Bart. "I'll look out for the two horses, with saddles and bridles and so on, and everything else we shall require I'll leave to you."

"Right you are."

"But I say, as you know so little about horses, can you ride one?"

"No," replied Bob Simmons firmly. "And I never knowed a sailor worth calling a sailor as could ride a horse. But all the same I can do what all sailors can do—I can stick on till I'm throwed off, and then I can get on again."

"That'll do capitally," laughed Bart. "We'll begin making our purchases now."

"We can try to, you mean. But there ain't a soul in the place sober enough yet to do anything except get drunker."

This sweeping assertion was so far verified that it was three whole days before everything was ready for the start up country for Digg's Gully, Woonga Station.

In the mean time little Septimus Faggles had done a startling thing. On hearing that the business of his guests was about to take them up country, he announced his intention of accompanying them.

"I shall take two horses," he said, "one for the saddle and one as a pack-horse. Out of the goods that I can carry with me I shall make a little fortune amongst the scattered settlers. I daresay they'll pay me chiefly in sheep—I shall drive home a regular flock."

"But what will become of your business here?" queried Bart, to whom the idea of the ex-poet's company was not altogether agreeable.

"I shall leave Rebecca to look after things in

my absence. When I thus mention my wife, sir, I mention the real cause of my anxiety to go on this excursion. You have seen Rebecca."

"Of course we have."

"Quite so. You have seen her. Can you wonder that I shall be glad to leave her, if only for a time? You have, so to speak, heard Rebecca's bark. Let me tell you, young sir, that her bite is worse than her bark."

"But she doesn't bite you."

"Not my body—she doesn't bite my body. But what about my soul?—she bites, as it were, the very calves of my soul. She has lately taken to keeping all the money we make in the business, allowing me two shillings a week as pocket money. The financial profits of my enterprise in going up country with you I shall keep myself. They will render me independent of her for months."

The little man set about his preparations with alacrity, his wife treating him and them with a sort of glum contempt. But the day before that fixed for the start he showed unmistakable signs of wavering. The fact was, he had heard such accounts of the dangers the party were likely to encounter from natives and bushrangers, to say nothing of the other dangers incidental to such a journey, that he had become desperately alarmed. His fears were increased when he found how heavily Bart and Bob were arming themselves. Their coolness amazed him. All day long his uneasiness grew and grew. Discovering his state

of mind, some mischievous neighbors concocted some harrowing reports of murders and mutilations and robberies with violence, and so worked upon him that when evening arrived he had resolved to make one desperate effort to back out with honor. His idea was so to impress upon his wife the frightful dangers he was about to face that she would either forbid him to go or beseech him not to.

There was no difficulty in leading up to the subject. Watching from the corners of his eyes their effect upon Rebecca, he recounted the fearsome stories he had heard.

She remained unmoved.

He then invented a number of gruesome tales exceeding in horror those that had been retailed to him.

Still she didn't flinch.

"Rebecca," he exclaimed at last, "I fully expect that we shall be annihilated—though I am determined to go upon this hazardous journey. But I think it only right to explain to you that from all I can understand of the manners and customs of the people we are certain to fall in with, I am not likely ever to return to you as I leave you. I shall probably be sent back to you in pieces."

"Faggles," said she, without a trace of emotion in her voice or manner, "however many pieces you may be sent back in I shall only pay for one funeral."

Then the wretched little man knew that all was lost. He must either cave in ignominiously or dare everything and start with Bart Arber and Bob Simmons in the morning.

“Simmons,” he hissed in that worthy’s ear the last thing that night, “*she’s a Tartar !*”

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE BUSH.

THE start was made at daybreak. Faggles seemed to have recovered his courage during the night, for he made no further attempt to find an excuse for remaining behind. His companions would just as soon have been without his society as with it, but could scarcely refuse to allow him to join them.

During the first day our three travelers covered scarcely more than ten miles, two causes delaying them—the difficulty that Faggles experienced in managing his pack-horse, and the great number of times that Bob Simmons was thrown. However, the distance they managed to accomplish, in spite of the hindrances so caused, got them well clear of the straggling shanties and homesteads that dotted the landscape for the first few miles beyond the town. Before they left, Bart despatched a long letter to his mother, which he sat up late the previous night to write. He also deposited, with an agent to whom he had been recommended, the greater portion of his remaining stock of ready money.

When darkness fell they off-saddled, tethered their steeds, made a hearty meal, wrapped their blankets round them, and went to sleep. Just as Faggles dropped off, Bart heard him murmur,

“She’s a Tartar—and I’m free.”

Stiff as they all were next day, they succeeded in doing a good twenty miles; Bob Simmons astonishing himself by the marked improvement in his horsemanship. He was only thrown seven times.

The second night, like the first, passed off without an adventure. But they decided, on halting for the day, to begin watch-keeping, dividing the hours of darkness into three spells, one for each.

“I’m sartain sure I caught sight of some black fellows—with spears too,” said Bob; “and as we don’t know what they may be up to, we’d better be on the safe side.”

So he took the first watch, Faggles the second, and Bart the third.

The following day, to avoid a long *détour*, the adventurous trio had to push their way through a dense wood, making such slow progress that in the course of twelve hours they added barely half-a-dozen miles to their credit. But they shot several parrots, which, though they did not taste very nice, added an acceptable variety to their midday meal.

Emerging into the open just before nightfall, they knocked over a young kangaroo, some parts of which tasted much nicer than the parrots.

They pitched on the high bank of a shallow river, with the sweet, cool water of which they refreshed their parched throats.

Their preparations for supper were disturbed by the intrusive attentions of a pack of hungry dingoes, or wild dogs, which became at last so demonstrative, that Bart seized his musket and shot a couple of them, "to encourage the others to keep away," he laughingly explained.

The order of the watches for that night was reversed, Bart taking the first and Bob Simmons the last, Faggles of course coming in between.

As soon as everything had been made snug, the two last-named stretched themselves out and almost instantly fell sound asleep.

Bart occupied the first part of his three hours of wakefulness with thoughts of the father to whom he was hastening, and of the mother he had left so far behind him. Then, in imagination, he spent a very pleasant time with Katie Caines, picturing her sitting there with him by the camp-fire. He became so absorbed in his reflections, that he was quite surprised when he found that it was time for him to be relieved of his guard.

He moved to Faggles and shook him by the shoulder.

"All right, Rebecca!" murmured Faggles drowsily.

"It isn't Rebecca—don't be afraid," said Bart. "Rouse up."

Faggles got on his feet, and prepared to take his turn cheerfully enough.

“Here’s your musket,” remarked Bart—“I’ve seen to the loading for you. Keep a smart lookout, and rouse us up at the very first sign of anything wrong. I’ve made up the fire, so you needn’t be afraid of the dingoes returning—the glare will keep them at a respectful distance.”

“I’m afraid of nothing,” was the valiant response.

In about two minutes from the moment that he had laid himself beside him, Bart joined the snoring Bob Simmons in the land of Nod.

For the greater portion of an hour Faggles managed to keep awake, but then he found himself getting gradually sleepier and sleepier.

“I don’t like the middle watch,” he soliloquized. “In the middle of a lovely snooze a fellow shakes you about, shoves you on your feet, puts a loaded gun in your hands, and tells you to keep awake during the very best part of the night for sleeping. What’ll happen when I’ve roused Bob Simmons to do his little bit and have gone to sleep again? Why, I shall be roused up with another rush, so to speak. Nature will wake me on the second occasion—but she does it with such a bang in these parts. Pop comes out the sun, and every bird for millions of miles around starts his own particular row—and in such a din as they make between them there’s no such thing as sleep.

“I wonder how Rebecca’s getting on? She was

too hard on me—far too hard. But—though of course I shouldn't like to confess it—I'm beginning to miss her."

Like many people who do wrong, he didn't mean to do it. That is to say, he didn't mean to fall asleep while it was his duty to keep awake. He didn't mean to do it, but he did.

His eyes only closed for a few minutes, and when he opened them again he was surprised to know that he had slept at all.

He sprang to his feet and glared around him. Just in time he caught sight of something in the high, thick grass surrounding the little encampment—something gliding noiselessly and snakily away. Before he really knew what he was doing, he raised his musket and fired in the direction of the creeping figure. Unused to fire-arms, he failed to hold his weapon with sufficient firmness. The recoil knocked him down backwards, and he fell into the midst of the still glowing fire.

Before his yells of agony rent the air, Bart and Bob, alarmed by the report of the gun, were on their legs. Bart seized his ready musket, Bob in a flash drew a brace of pistols.

"What's wrong?" cried Bart.

"What's the matter?" echoed Bob.

"Find me a damp place to sit in," halloaed Faggles, "and I'll tell you."

Then he pointed to the spot in the direction of which he had fired.

"A black fellow," he gasped. "I saw him plainly, crawling away."

Bart rushed to the spot. He and Bob reconnoitered all round about it, extending their search to a circumference of hundreds of yards, but they could find no trace of the runaway visitor.

"Are you sure you saw him?" asked Bart.

"Positive," affirmed Faggles.

"What did you want to let fly at him like that for?" said Bob. "Some of the blacks are friendly enough."

"If he wanted to be friendly," argued Faggles, "why did he come creeping and crawling like a snake? Why did he come in the night, instead of waiting till daylight to pay us his respects in a proper manner? If he wanted to buy a suit of clothes—he hadn't any on—I don't do business in the middle of the night."

"I tell you what it is," Faggles, said Bob uneasily, "this black fellow you say you saw may have been a friendly chap enough, who came to overhaul us a bit out of curiosity—and in the dark because he was afraid to come in the light. Opening fire on him at sight, as you did, without first speaking him or overhauling his papers . . ."

"Papers? I tell you he had no clothes on to put 'em in."

"You know well enough what I mean. I mean that, treating him *as* an enemy off-hand, maybe you've *made* him an enemy, and along of him all his tribe."

"That's just the danger," agreed Bart. "We must keep our weather eyes open day and night."

"I . . I don't think I hit him," said the crest-fallen Faggles.

"Don't suppose you did," admitted Bob with uncomplimentary readiness.

"No," said Bart ; "if you had hit him we should have been almost certain to have come on traces of his blood."

After such a thorough scare, neither Bart nor Faggles felt any inclination for further sleep, but Bob Simmons proved himself quite capable of resuming his slumber as though nothing had happened, so was suffered to sleep on undisturbed until the dawn of the party's fourth day in the bush.

They made good progress for a couple of hours, and then halted for breakfast.

"This is our fourth day out, Bob," said Bart as the meal ended, "and I don't think we've covered more than forty-five miles."

"Just about ; but it's broken country, and we've had to tack a bit now and then," replied Bob Simmons, producing a rough chart of the country, which they had been able to obtain in Sydney, and on which every day's course had been pricked off as accurately as it could be judged.

After a brief study of the chart they made out their bearings for the remainder of that day's journey, and with the expressed determination of

pushing on as fast as possible, remounted their steeds, Faggles being already on his.

Bart rode on a little ahead. Suddenly he drew rein, and held up his hand as a signal to the two riders behind him. He dismounted and knelt in the grass, closely examining it.

"What is it?" asked Bob, drawing up alongside.

"Blood," answered Bart. "I'm afraid Faggles may have hit that black fellow last night after all, and that he's been running away in this direction. Look here!"—and he pointed to some dark-looking, clotted spots.

The sailor instantly dismounted and knelt by Bart's side.

"Let's get on the trail," he said, moving off. Fresh blood marks were found not far off, leading into the bush. Following them up, they came on the fallen body of a native, almost hidden in the grass.

He was wounded, but his hurt was not a gunshot wound. He appeared to have been struck on the head from behind with some blunt instrument. A little rough-and-ready, sailor-like surgery soon restored him to consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked at the three white faces bending over him.

"Bobo!" was his first remark.

"Who's Bobo?" said Bob.

The little black fellow touched himself on the chest.

"White fellows call me Bobo, plenty long time ago."

He sat up and pointed his finger at Faggles.

"What for white fellow make thunder-fire at black fellow?" he demanded.

"What for black fellow come prowling round white fellows, then?" retaliated Faggles.

"Plenty little harm," said Bobo.

"I told you he might be a friendly," put in Bob Simmons; "and so he is. Look at him—listen to him; he's a friendly enough little chap."

Bobo snapped at the phrase. He looked delightedly at the big sailor.

"Friendly chappee," he grinned; "plenty friendly. Bobo friendly chappee."

He proceeded to explain that he had been knocked on the head with a flat stone by a member of a tribe hostile to his tribe, his assailant making off without stopping to finish him.

"Just a sort of how-d'-ye-do crack," suggested Bob.

"But a serious crack for us," said Bart, "for it proves that dangerous natives are about."

"Plenty black fellows here," said the "friendly chappie."

"Where are they hiding then?" asked Bart.

The black swept his hand around to indicate the four quarters of the compass.

"White fellows no eyes. Can't see black fellows—black fellows see white fellows all day."

Bobo's ugly wound seemed to give him little or

no concern, though he appeared very grateful to his white friends for the evident relief which their attention to it had afforded him, and for the plentiful breakfast to which they treated him. Considering that his skull had been cracked a few hours before, his appetite was really surprising.

Our travelers left him to finish the meal by himself after getting from him some valuable hints as to their course for Digg's Gully.

"Friendly chappee!" cried Bobo reassuringly after them, as they rode off.

They slept that night in a squatter's hut, after covering a distance which they calculated at almost thirty miles—the best day's work they had yet done. The squatter gave them some ominous warnings as to the dangers in their path. Not only were the natives to be feared, but gangs of bushrangers. These desperadoes had been unusually busy of late, their atrocities making the very thought of them a terror. Digg's Gully he described as a wild and isolated spot, with the most unsavory of reputations.

Bart was first down in the morning, with the exception of the squatter himself, whom he found busy making tea. Stepping outside to draw in a few breaths of the sweet air of the dawn, Bart was astounded to find Bobo hanging about the place.

"Friendly chappee," smiled the black fellow.

The squatter laughed at Bart's astonishment.

"They're funny fellows, these little blacks," he observed, after hearing how his guests had made

Bobo's acquaintance. "As likely as not this chap—I know him well—will keep in touch with you now to the end of your journey, though you'll see little of him. By the by, don't give him things—let him steal them, he'll like it much better. The aborigines here are not great thieves naturally, but some of them have acquired the habit of stealing from contact with the whites!"

At Bart's suggestion Faggles made the kindly squatter a present of several articles from the stock he had brought with him. These were gratefully accepted, and their recipient would have bought the entire stock if he had had any money to pay for them with; but, as the only payment he could offer was in the form of sheep, a deal was not concluded. Although the draper had spoken of driving home a "regular flock" of the animals, by this time he had abandoned all ambition of returning in such a pastoral character.

A fine, open stretch of country now lay before our adventurers. There seemed to be no more swamps and ravines to delay their progress at this portion of their journey, so they pushed on bravely.

"We've covered a hundred miles," said Bart triumphantly as they made all snug for the night.

"A hundred miles—more," murmured Faggles. "A hundred miles—more—away from my poor wife."

"He's a waverin'," whispered Bob to Bart. "when we left, Rebecca was a Tartar—now she's

his poor wife. Before we fetch Sydney again, she'll have rose to a angel," he concluded prophetically.

The next day was Sunday, and it was agreed that it should be regarded as a day of rest for both horsemen and horses. The latter were showing signs of a little exhaustion, hardy though they were.

Bobo turned up at the very instant that breakfast was spread, the manner of his appearance almost giving the impression that he had been watching the preparation of the meal from some hidden coigne of 'vantage till the moment should arrive when it would be ready for consumption.

He simply remarked that he was a friendly chappee, and squatted down. He ate about as much as the three others put together, and disappeared to sleep off his heavy repast. Nothing more was seen of him that day.

When night came it was arranged that Bob should take the first watch, Bart the second, and Faggles the last.

After rousing Faggles to relieve him when the second watch was over, Bart was soon asleep.

Before dawn he woke. Why did he spring so sharply to his feet? Why, with alarmed eyes, did he peer so searchingly all round the little encampment?

"Up, Bob—up!" he cried. "*Faggles has disappeared.*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLACK WHITES AND BLACK BLACKS.

THERE could be no doubt about the fact—Faggles had gone. So had all the horses. Bart and Bob Simmons searched every inch of ground within a circumference of several hundreds of yards, but found no trace of their missing comrade. Then, softly at first and more loudly afterwards, they raised “Coo . . ee . . ee” time after time, but no answering call reached their straining ears. Lighting each a lantern, they continued the search, but unavailingly, save that they found easily enough the trail of the horses’ hoofs.

They looked blankly in each other’s faces.

“Could the animals have slipped their anchors and scudded off say just as Faggles caught sight of the dodge? Faggles gives chase and makes away in their stern. Eh?”

Bart shook his head.

“No, Bob. Look—the tethering ropes have been *cut*.” (They had not adopted the usual Australian custom of hobbling the horses with leathern straps.)

Simmons gave a low whistle, full of meaning.

"Bart, it's treachery," he said firmly.

"I'm afraid so."

"That traitory little lubber Bobo . . ."

"Yes, but he must have had help. I think I can see through it all. He's been in touch with his tribe the whole time. A number of them crept up in their soft way under cover of the darkness, surprised Faggles—probably knocked him on the head from behind—and dragged him off with everything they could lay their hands on without waking you and me."

"But daren't take our arms because we were sleeping with them in our hands. What's to be done?"

"We can do nothing till the morning, which will break very soon now. Then our first duty will be to make every possible effort to trace poor Faggles."

"And if we find him to fight for him."

"Of course, if necessary."

"Well, I'm a peaceable man . . ."

"Remarkably."

"But all the same, if so be as there *is* fighting on hand, of course I'm ready to do my whack."

"And a little bit over. If we don't come on the trail, I don't see what we can do. For Digg's Gully we set out, and to Digg's Gully I'm going if I walk every inch of the way. But I shall take a heavy heart there if we are obliged to leave our poor companion to his fate."

"Look ye here, Bart. The first thing, as you

say, is to do all we can ourselves. If we fail, we must make all sail for the nearest squatter's. According to our present bearings, the settler we heard of at the hut where we anchored on Friday night is pitched about twenty miles ahead, and near him is a small station. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, and I see your plan. If our own efforts to find Faggles and recover our horses fail, we must push on as fast as we can on foot to this Mr. Cameron's—that was the name—give the alarm, raise a party, and scour the country till we come on the thieves."

"Ex-ackly so," said Bob.

With the dawn the search was renewed. On account of the nature of the ground, the first trail of the horses was soon lost. It was re-discovered for a short distance, and then, to Bart's and Bob's unaccustomed eyes, lost again completely.

Weary and disheartened, they threw themselves down.

"There's nothing for it," said Bart, "but to push on to Cameron's. If we're to get there any time to-night we've no time to lose."

Instead of replying, Bob Simmons—his eyes fixed on a thick clump of bushes a few yards off—held up his hand as a warning for silence. The next moment he leaped to his feet and dived into the bush, from which arose almost instantly ear-piercing yells and screams.

"Got him," roared Bob as he rushed out, dragging Bobo by the ear; "Caught sight of his black hide as he squatted up from a snooze. Got him!"

"Friendly chappee!" squeaked poor Bobo at the top of his voice.

"I'll give you 'friendly chappee.' There won't be any chappee left of you by the time I've finished."

"What for plenty big white fellow finish black fellow?"

"What for?" shouted the "plenty big white fellow," as he shook his frightened captive till Bart thought his teeth would fall out. "How dare you ask what for?"

"Look here, Bob," put in Bart, "after all we have no actual evidence yet against this little fellow."

"No more we have," said Bob candidly, as though a new thought had just occurred to him. "Not a atom."

"Very well, then, leave off shaking him before he has no breath left to answer our questions."

"Cart'n'ly," agreed the impulsive sailor, releasing his struggling victim.

The instant Bobo found himself free, with a leap and a dive he plunged back to the spot from which Bob Simmons had dragged him. The two "white fellows" sprang after him, but before they reached him he had picked up the spear he had rushed to recover, and stood facing them both in a menacing attitude, his eyes flashing with anger.

"Now that's pluck," exclaimed the admiring Robert Simmons; "real pluck—real fighting pluck : same as that other nigger had who killed the shark at Port Royal."

"White fellows take care," cried Bobo.

"All right," said Bart. "We'll take care of ourselves and you too."

After a little persuasion Bobo laid down his spear and entered into conversation. His manner, quite as much as his words, soon sufficed to convince his questioners of his absolute innocence of any share in the outrage that had been committed. This being so, they did not hesitate to accept his ready offer of assistance.

"White fellows no eyes," said he contemptuously, as he heard of the unsuccessful attempts to find and follow the trail of the marauders. "Black fellow find plenty soon."

"Depend upon it, if anybody can get on the track he can," exclaimed Bart.

"Then let him get under way at once," replied Bob, "and we'll keep close in his wake."

But to this suggestion Bobo absolutely refused to agree. He insisted upon going away by himself. His white friends were to await his return. He candidly informed them that they would be worse than useless at the present juncture.

The savage was master of the situation, and had his own way. It was hours before he came back, but when he did come he brought news. He had found the trail of horses and a number of men.

“Plenty black fellows, one white fellow, plenty long time after.”

“That confirms our theory,” said Bart hastily. “Faggles was carried away helpless at first, and only made to walk away when he could walk.”

Simmons nodded his acquiescence, and the spy proceeded with his story. He stated, with the calm confidence of one who laid down facts of which he had discovered the proofs, that the party whose track he had followed had been presently joined by two other men, and that these two men were whites. The white men’s trail was soon lost—they had no doubt mounted two of the stolen horses. Following up his scent—how far it was impossible to calculate with accuracy, for Bobo seemed to have no idea of distance—he had come on something stuck into the bark of a gum tree with the blade of an open penknife. He had been so much amongst white fellows that he knew what it was. It was one of the papers on which they talked to each other. He had torn it down and hurried back with it, and he was plenty hungry.

Taking no notice for the present of this broad hint as to the state of Bobo’s appetite, Bart snatched the paper from his hand. It was a hastily penciled communication from the lost Faggles.

“Read it,” cried Bob Simmons excitedly, craning his head over Bart’s shoulder. “I can read, but I read too slow. Pay it out loud.”

Bart had already run through the hurried lines, but now he read aloud :

“Carried off by blacks. Blacks in league with white bushrangers, two of whom have joined us. They were going to stick me up, but I offered to join them, and they spared my life. Their game is robbery and murder. As far as I can understand, we are on our way to meet the rest of the gang. If you have been able to follow, and if you find this, on no account attempt to come to closer quarters by yourselves. We are far too strong. Get on to the next station and raise a big party. Wherever we go I’ll manage to leave traces behind us. If you obtain assistance and ever come up with us, let special precautions be taken that I am not shot at by mistake. What would my dear Rebecca say if she knew that her husband had become a Bushranger ?”

Their course was now perfectly clear. They must start for Cameron’s at once, and travel if possible all night.

“Come on, Bob. Let’s pull ourselves together, and we’ll save Faggles and recover our property too.”

“Aye, aye,” was the cheerful response ; “and help to stop the murderous game of these land pirates. I’m ready.”

“Plenty hungry.”

The repetition of Bobo’s plaintive intimation re-

minded them that they had themselves been fasting a long time. Apart from their own needs, they felt bound to fill the stomach of the little black who had already proved himself so valuable an ally. They had carried with them—with everything else of which they had not been robbed—their simple cooking utensils, so proceeded to kindle a fire and prepare a meal. To the regulation tea and damper were added the best portions of an opossum which had fallen a victim to Bart's gun.

"Bobo's a brick," remarked Simmons as he sliced off some huge pieces of opossum flesh for the native.

"Friendly chappee," said Bobo.

"I tell you what, Bob," Bart observed, "we can't get on without him. He's an awful beggar to eat, but we could better afford to give him a score of meals a day than lose his services. I hope he won't raise any objection to coming with us, because if he does we shall have to make him.

Bobo dispelled all doubt of his willingness to take part in the adventure in hand by declaring his intention of acting as guide to Mr. Cameron's farm, adding that the "white fellows couldn't see without black fellow."

"Look here, Mr. Bobo," said Bob, "we've heard quite enough from you about that. Wait till I get you on board ship, and I'll show you who's got the eyes then."

Bobo ate a great deal too much, and then refused

to move till he had had a sleep. He curled himself up and sunk instantly into slumber. He woke at the end of an hour "as fresh as new paint"—to use Bob Simmon's expression—and the start for Cameron's was immediately made.

All night long they traveled. At dawn the little settlement was in sight.

Mr. Cameron turned out to be a hale, hardy, middle-aged man, with a good deal about him that reminded Bart and his chum of poor Mr. McCroft, late first lieutenant of the *Hawk*. As a matter of fact Gavin Cameron, like Lieutenant McCroft, was of Scotch parentage though there was scarcely a trace of the heather on his tongue. He heard the story of his unexpected visitors quietly, made up his mind quickly, and as quickly proceeded to put his plans into execution.

"First," he said, "you'll have breakfast and go to bed. You want both. I'll ride round, and send my shepherd round, and collect as strong a party as possible. It'll be none too strong, though, for this blackguardly alliance between white bushrangers and hostile blacks is dangerous. We've heard a lot about it lately, so your news does not so greatly surprise me. But it's the first time that anything of the sort has been heard of in the country till quite recently. All being well, it won't be heard of again after we've done our work. The white ruffians—about half-a-dozen, chiefly escaped convicts—hail from Digg's Gully, up by Woonga Station."

"Digg's Gully!" cried Bart.

"Aye. Is it for Digg's Gully you're bound?"

"Yes, Mr. Cameron."

"Well, it'll be a much safer place for you if we can manage to shoot or hang these desperadoes from the Gully before you reach it. I suppose you know that we have only one law for any bushranger taken red-handed—Lynch law. And Lynch law allows no quarter."

"Quite right, sir," said Bob Simmons. "No quarter for pirates, afloat or ashore."

"There is no doubt but that the gang into whose hands your comrade has fallen is the mixed gang whose outrages for miles around have raised the hands of every honest man against every member of it. Its leader is a cut-throat scoundrel known, feared, and dreaded, as Blackbird Bill. He has threatened before now to pay me a visit."

"'Blackbird' seems a good sort of a name for him," remarked Bob.

"People get strange nicknames out here," replied Mr. Cameron with a half-smile. "The gang is known as the Blackbird Gang."

"Nothing's too black to name such black un's by, sir. Taking the color o' the heart instead o' the skin, the black Whites in this here gang are blacker than the black Blacks."

"Very well put," said Mr. Cameron. "Unless we rescue your friend in time, his fate is certain."

The prosperous Scotch squatter was the happy possessor of a wife and daughters, to whom he

now delivered over his guests. These ladies were thirsty for a talk with the new comers from the Old Country, and they took good care to have it. Long before either talk or breakfast was over, Mr. Cameron had set off in one direction and his stockman in another. Just before nightfall they came galloping back, accompanied by five other well-mounted men.

A sort of council of war was immediately held. It was evident that "blood was up," and that a determined effort to trace and break up the marauding band was about to be made. Of the party collected by Mr. Cameron three were settlers like himself, one was a convict who had been "assigned" to the farmers he was working for, and one was a "ticket-of-leave" man. Bart and Bob of course brought up the little force to the number of nine.

Great deference was paid to the views of Cameron, as he proceeded to expound his plan of action.

"We're nine," said he, "and I can throw in another couple, both trustworthy shepherds of mine. That makes eleven. Considering their strength, the Blackbirds are not unlikely to make an attempt to loot this place, instead of waiting to be attacked. In fact, I've had a warning. In view of this possibility—I'm afraid I might say probability—my place is here, to defend my wife and children. At the same time, we mustn't give the gang a chance of clearing out. Let three men

remain with me, and the other seven go after the gang. The friendly black who's still about the place somewhere—I gave orders he was not to be allowed out of sight—must act as guide."

The plan was at once agreed to. Bobo—who had done nothing but eat since his arrival in the morning—was summoned, and on being told what was required of him, instantly acquiesced. He explained to the assembled company that he was a friendly chappee, and, further, that as the hostile blacks in league with the bushrangers—it might be more correct to say the blacks whom the bushrangers were making use of for their own nefarious ends—were enemies of his own people, and that as it was one of them who had knocked him on the head a day or two before, he would be plenty glad to help the white fellows make thunder-fire on them.

When it came to a question of the formation of the two parties into which it had been decided to separate, Mr. Cameron turned to Bart and Bob Simmons.

"Excuse me, but do you know much about fighting?"

"Well, as for me," began Bob, "I'm a peaceable man, but I try to do a bit when my hand's in."

When it was found what the experience of the two strangers had been they went up immensely in the estimation of their companions, and it was immediately suggested that such valuable aid as

theirs was likely to be should be divided. It was settled that Bart should go with the attacking party and Bob remain behind.

“ You needn't be afraid as to the fidelity of the convicts amongst us,” said the Scotchman to the former aside, “ for they're right enough. I know something of them or shouldn't trust them—though an ordinary convict is an honest man compared with a bushranger.”

A couple of hours later the party of seven, all mounted and all well armed, set out, led by Bobo.

As they parted, Bart and Bob grasped hands.

Strange things were to happen before those two honest hands touched again.

CHAPTER XIX.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

THE little force moved as in an enemy's country, for Cameron had insisted upon the possibility of the Blackbirds being already in the neighborhood.

So at first slow progress was made. By and by the moon rose, and then they were able to push on faster.

"It seems to me," said Bart, "that our proper course is to make direct, and as quickly as possible now, to the spot up to which our little black fellow traced the rascals. The letter he brought from the kidnapped man promised that he would do his utmost to leave an unmistakable trail, and depend upon it he'll manage to do so. The quickest way of getting on their present track, even if they're heading now for the settlement, is to follow it up from their old one."

This being the idea of all of them, Bobo, much to his dissatisfaction and displeasure, was hoisted up behind Bart, and the horses were urged on.

By dawn the party were in the neighborhood of the spot they sought.

A halt was made, and Bobo sent out to reconnoiter, with the rash promise that he should have as much to eat as he could get down if he returned with satisfactory intelligence.

Hours passed before he got back. Just as uneasy fears and suspicions began to be expressed about him he was seen bounding along towards the encampment.

He had found the trail, lost it, regained it, Faggles having dropped a number of articles which had shown the way to the Blackbirds' camping-place of the previous night. The gang had taken things easily, for they had slept within a dozen miles of the scene of their recent outrage. Here Faggles had managed to leave behind a second communication.

"They have just decided what to do. We're moving for Cameron's, which is to be attacked to-night. Cameron to be killed, to pay off an old grudge, and his place to be looted. We are about twenty hostile blacks, four whites, and myself beside. And I am beside myself."

It was now noon—the note had been penciled about six hours ago. A brief consultation followed its reading—very brief, for there was little to consult about.

"They've played right into our hands, mates," cried Bart. "As they advance, we follow them up. They'll make the attack on Mr. Cameron's

before the moon rises—they'll find themselves in the darkness between two fires—the fire of his party and ours."

"We'll do better than clip the Blackbird's wings this time," said one of the stockmen ("Dick" everybody called him) who had a natural liking for metaphor—"we'll make a pie of 'em."

"Bobo eat it," said the friendly chappee.

"I believe you would," remarked the shepherd.

"I never met such a little guzzler in my life."

"Plenty fond of food," confessed Bobo.

"Well, eat now, have one little sleep to rest yourself, and then we'll start. All being well, you'll have fighting for supper."

"Plenty fond fighting too."

As usual, he woke from the heavy sleep that followed his heavy meal quite fresh and ready for his work. The horses too had enjoyed a thorough rest.

Riding in an oblique direction until Bobo came on the fresh trail, within two hours the party were pushing on in the rear of the gang for Gavin Cameron's farm. When night fell they had succeeded in getting as close on their heels as they desired. For fear of overtaking them too soon, or of betraying their own contiguity, Bart suggested that they should make a rapid détour, and reach the neighborhood of the farmhouse first.

"We'll hide in the scrub about a quarter-of-a mile this side, and wait till the blackguards are between us and the house. A rush from us and

a sally from Cameron's side, and it will be 'hands up!' with all of them."

The *détour* was made and the hiding-place safely reached. Here the horses were made to lie down, the waiting horsemen crouching beside them. Either the gang were late or the moon was early, for already her white clear light was beginning to shine.

Bobo was outscouting. Soon he came creeping silently, cautiously, swiftly through the long grass, with the news that he had sighted the Blackbirds. By this time they must be almost abreast of the ambush. There would be no opportunity now to send word to the settlement, but this did not matter, for Cameron's party were certain to be on the alert. Another minute or two, and the moment for action would have arrived.

For about as long let us join the kidnapped Faggles.

The "black Blacks" and "black Whites" with whom he had professed to throw in his lot were marching up in irregular formation, the blacks, armed only with their native weapons, in a first loose line, Faggles himself, gun in hand, a yard or two in their rear, and the four white bush-rangers, mounted and armed with pistols, and two of them with muskets as well, behind Faggles.

Poor little Septimus was literally trembling and shaking with fear. But all the same he had

made up his mind what to do and he was going to do it—though “Blackbird Bill,” the handsome but ferocious-looking scoundrel immediately behind him had threatened to blow out his brains at the first and faintest sign of treachery, and was certain to be as good, or rather as bad, as his word. All the same, Faggles was going to do what he had determined upon doing long ago.

Now that’s just where true bravery, “real grit,” comes in. It’s far braver to do a thing when you’re honestly afraid to do it than to do the same thing when you’re not afraid to do it. Years ago—I was only a boy myself when I read it, but I’ve never forgotten it—I came across an anecdote which exactly illustrates what I mean.

During a certain general engagement, a body of officers in an exceptional position found themselves under a galling and unexpected fire. As the bullets were ping-pinging about their ears, one officer was observed to tremble a little and turn pale. An officer of equal rank—who was incapable of experiencing what I will call physical fear—turned to him, and said with a sneer,

“Why, Major, *you’re afraid!*”

“If you were half as much afraid as I am, sir,” was the quiet reply, “*you’d run away!*”

There you are, boys. One was afraid and the other wasn’t, but *each remained*. Which was the braver?

Arrived within about a thousand yards of the stockade around Mr. Cameron’s dwelling.

“Just stop those blacks there, sharp,” ordered the chief of the bushrangers.

Faggles obeyed. Down from his saddle stepped Blackbird Bill and his three companions. They slipped their arms through the bridles, and followed on foot the again advancing first line, audibly cursing the moon, in whose beautiful light the dark deed in hand would now have to be consummated.

“I shall send the niggers on directly by themselves to begin the attack, while we keep out of range. If Cameron has got wind of this affair he may have obtained help and be ready for us. If so—we shall soon know—we’ll mount and make a bolt of it. If not, of course we’ll follow up the blacks at once.”

This was the chivalrous scheme of Blackbird Bill himself. The moment for the execution of Faggles’s scheme had almost arrived. All day long he had been thinking hard of Rebecca, and wishing himself safe back again with her with all his heart and soul. He thought harder of her than ever as he raised his musket to his shoulder. He was going to fire it—taking the risk of again being knocked backwards, with the much more serious one I have already alluded to—in order that the inmates of Cameron’s house might be alarmed in time.

Loud and clear, and far and wide, echoed the report in the still night air.

With an oath, the robber-chief of the bush-rangers rushed up to him.

"Rebecca!" yelled Faggles, as he lifted his gun and knocked him, stunned, on the ground with the butt-end.

"Now, lads!" cried Bart—and out from the scrub dashed the party in ambuscade, firing a volley as soon as they were close enough to identify, and avoid, Faggles who had been graphically described to them.

"Bang, bang, bang, bang," went four guns from the other side of the stockade, from which—hearing, understanding, and answering the shouts of their friends in rear of the enemy—rushed Cameron, Bob Simmons, and the other men who had been left to guard the place. Bart's party closed in on the attacker's rear.

Faggles was seized with an absolute frenzy. He clubbed his bewildered black "friends" right and left, yelling "Rebecca!" as his war-cry the whole time. Attacked in front and rear, they knew not where to hurl their spears, so hurled them anywhere. One of these spears pierced the brain of one of the white leaders of the gang, and killed him. The two others continued firing. Their chief had already raised himself to his feet mounted his horse, and galloped away in the confusion.

It was a fight and a stampede, mixed, and was all over well within five minutes.

Three of the blacks were slain, and double that

number wounded ; some got away—the rest were made prisoners, as were two of the white bandits. A third having been speared, where was the fourth—Blackbird Bill himself ?

He was nowhere to be found. To the bitter chagrin and mortification of the victors, they realized that he had escaped.

Mr. Cameron had a bullet wound through his right hand, and two of his men were a little more seriously hurt.

“Where’s my mate?” cried Bob Simmons suddenly. “Where’s Bart Arber?”

He was missing.

A long and eager and anxious search was made, but the searchers failed to find him.

On the crest of a little ridgeway some distance off Bob raised his stentorian voice in “coo . . ee” after “coo . . ee.” But there came no answering sound.

A long way from the sailor’s big form a ferocious little black lay hidden in the grass. He fixed his spear in his throwing-stick—an ingenious implement by means of which the Australian natives are able to project their spears to almost an incredible distance—and took aim, in the bright moonlight, at Bob’s heart.

The weapons hurtled through the air, and struck him full in the breast. He was picked up and carried indoors, where Mr. Cameron applied his own lips to the wound lest there should be poison in it.

Early in the morning a party of police rode up to the house. They had been despatched several days before from Sydney. News of the atrocities of the Blackbirds had reached the authorities there and they had at last sent men to deal with the outlaws. A few minutes after their arrival Bob Simmons recovered consciousness.

"My mate," were his first words—"has he turned up? Is there any news of him?"

Mr. Cameron answered the two questions with one word.

"No," he said.

CHAPTER XX.

A TERRIBLE MEETING.

THE horse with which Mr. Cameron supplied our hero for the ride in chase of the Blackbirds was a young and spirited one. On several occasions during that long ride it showed a disposition to rebel and bolt, and was only restrained and mastered with difficulty.

When its rider and his companions charged out from their ambush in the scrub, and the fight with the gang under Blackbird Bill commenced, the shouts and the shots had a maddening effect upon its nerves. It plunged and reared and swerved and edged away. Bart was doing his utmost to get it under control when a spear struck it in the flanks. Despite all Bart's endeavors, it managed to get the bit between its teeth and made off. Realizing that it had at last got completely out of hand, the lad's first hope was that it would make for its stable.

But no : it headed straight away. On and on it tore at a wild, mad gallop. To throw himself off was out of the question—he must stick on till the speed told upon its wind and strength, and then remaster it. Mile after mile the mad ride

lasted. At last the hurrying beast entered a sparsely-treed track, leading to a thick forest right ahead.

Bart felt unless he could pull it up now he had better slip down at all hazards, or he would soon be dashed to pieces against one of the huge trees in the far spreading thicket they were so rapidly approaching.

Then a better idea struck him, and he put it into execution. As the horse dashed into the forest, he kicked his feet free of the stirrups, drew them up, and, leaping into the air, grasped with both hands the lowest growing branches of a tree against the bark of which the runaway almost grazed himself. He dropped safely to the ground—the now riderless horse was soon out of sight and hearing.

Where was he?

“The answer to that,” he thought to himself, “is simply that I’m lost. I should like to get back to Cameron’s to-night, but I’m doubtful if I’m equal to it. I’m getting done up. Besides, what are my bearings?”

They were not easy to find. The moon was clouding darkly over. It would be easy to lose his way more hopelessly than he had lost it already.

If he slept a little—slept till daylight—he might in the end reach the settler’s sooner than by trying to get on the way back now.

He entered a little farther into the forest, tore down a few branches and formed a rough shelter, beneath which he fell asleep quickly enough, after

eating the scanty provisions remaining in his wallet.

Tired and exhausted, the sun was high in the heavens before he woke.

“Hands up!”

This was the terrible summons uttered in a loud, fierce voice, that at last aroused him.

A fierce-looking, bearded man stood over him, covering his head with a cocked pistol. The fine horse from which the fellow had dismounted pawed the ground just by; even at that trying moment Bart identified it as the animal he had bought in Sydney for his journey to Digg's Gully. It was his own stolen horse.

“Make a single move and I'll blow your brains out. Hands up!”

Bart threw his hands above his head.

“Now stand.”

“Who are you?” Bart demanded as he obeyed the order.

“I'm sorry there's nobody here to introduce me,” said the robber with a grim laugh. “But if you won't stand too much upon ceremony, I'll introduce myself. I have the honor to be known as Blackbird Bill!”

Then Bart remembered where and when he had for a second seen that sin-scarred but still handsome face before. It was the face of the fallen bushranger upon whose body he had with difficulty prevented his horse from trampling the night before in the scrimmage in front of

Cameron's stockade. He remembered now that he had heard a cry of "That's him—looks as though he was winged at last."

He was indeed in the power—in, so to speak, the very hands—of the notorious outlaw whose career of violence and bloodshed he had himself been doing his utmost to help in ending.

"You'll find some rope in my pocket. Take it out."

"Are you going to stick me up?"

"Ask no questions. I really haven't time to answer them," said the Blackbird, with mock politeness. "I'm on my way to a safe place, and this little bit of chance business on the road must be done quickly."

Keeping his victim carefully covered, he bound the helpless Bart to the trunk of a tree. Then with trained expedition he rifled him of everything save the clothes upon his body.

Bart had upon him letters and papers revealing clearly his own identity and the object of his visit to Australia—the object of his life. He shivered as the brutal bushranger opened and read everything: read of himself and—his father. He did so read—though the reading took him some little time. Only when he faced round again and thrust the documents into his pocket did Bart plead for their restoration. He had feared to do so before lest the betrayal of his eager anxiety to have them restored to him should influence the wretch to refuse.

"No," was his only reply now, as he moved to mount his horse.

As suddenly and as unexpectedly as though they had sprung from the ground or dropped from the skies, two men—two of Cameron's men who had been of "Bart's party" in the recent exploit—appeared upon the scene. With the barrels of their raised pistols glinting in the sunshine, they confronted the trapped leader of the Blackbirds.

"Hands up!"

But almost point-blank he fired at them, his bullet singeing the hair of one of the couple, who instantly fired in return.

The bushranger saved his life by crouching behind the body of his horse. The finger of the other of Cameron's men—Dick—literally trembled on the trigger, but he did not pull it.

"Hands up!" he cried again, while his comrade quickly reloaded.

Before Blackbird Bill had another chance, two pistols were held close to his head. This time he did throw up his hands.

He was quickly and securely bound to the tree from which Bart was released.

The story of the rescuers was soon told.

"A patrol of police is up from Sydney. Chiefly in couples, we all started hunting for you and this beauty here. We're the lucky pair who've found you and caught him."

All Bart's inquiries were answered. He was greatly distressed to hear that Bob Simmons had

been wounded, and wanted to start for Cameron's at once.

But "No, sir," said Dick. "We arranged this hunt on a plan by which each brace of us should be in touch with the rest within an hour or two, and it was settled that the first to find you or run the other quarry to ground should call in the other chaps. Now my mate and I have killed you two birds with one stone, in a manner of speaking, and what we must do is to leave you in charge of the prisoner while we ride off—our horses are handy—to bring the others in. Then we'll all go back in one company."

He pointed to the "stuck up" bushranger, who presented anything but a "stuck-up" appearance in the other meaning of the phrase.

"I'm afraid," he said mournfully, "that now the police are here, we shan't be allowed to cook this fellow's goose on the premises. They'll take him to Sydney and hang him there. It's a shame, but I'm afraid there's no help for it."

He examined the knotting of the ropes that bound Blackbird Bill to the tree-trunk—arms, legs, and body.

"He's as safe a fixture as the tree itself," he declared. "And there's no fear of the runaway blacks. Bobo has traced them miles into the bush the other side of the settlement. He speared a few of 'em for the sake of old lang syne, and for practise."

Dick and his mate rode off. Bart and the

prisoner were alone. Half an hour passed in absolute silence. Then the latter spoke.

"They're just about far enough off now. Untie these ropes, and let me go."

Bart stared at the captive with unmitigated amazement as he made this cool demand.

"Untie these ropes, and let me go."

"I'd shoot you first."

"There's a price upon my head. Untie these ropes, and let me go."

"I won't!"

Blackbird Bill looked Bart Arber full and square in the face with unflinching eyes, as in a low, quick, quiet, earnest voice—a voice with the ring of absolute assurance in it—he said :

"Yes, you will. I AM YOUR FATHER!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MOUNTAIN CAVE.

“I am your father !”

Mingled horror and incredulity were in the poor lad's eyes—a sickly faintness was in his heart.

“No, no—God help me—no, no, no : you cannot be.”

“Why not, boy ? Your own papers have told me who you are—my son. Did you expect to find your father unchanged ? Did you expect to find him a man after having been made to live like a dog ? Do you suppose that the hulks, a convict transport ship, the chains of a felon, leave a man as he was ? Loose me—or a father's blood be on your soul.”

The incredulity faded from Bart's face. Only the horror was there now. He couldn't stand, Had he not fallen on his knees he would have fallen on his face.

He was a little steadier now, though still he trembled and shuddered and shook.

We often get steadier on our knees. We often gather strength on our knees, boys.

He uttered no words. His quivering lips could have formed none. Nevertheless he prayed.

The shivering of his hands, his tearless sobbing, the dumb agony of his thoughts—the shrinking of his soul from this fact of terror that must cast the blackness of its shadow on the past as well as over all the future—were all a prayer.

From this great Prayer of his Pain he staggered to his feet.

William Arber—so we must call him now—was speaking again. Bart saw his lips moving—he heard the sound of words, but he heard as one who hears the sound of something meaningless.

“Quick, boy. I know a place of safety to which they will never track me, but I must reach it in time. Quick—untie these ropes.”

“A place of safety”—he was dreaming, and some one was uttering those words in his dream. No—suddenly he realized their import: realized the danger from which this place of which his father spoke would be a refuge.

He hesitated no longer. True, this man’s life was forfeited by his crimes—justly forfeited. But it was not, it could not be, for him, his own son, to be the executioner. And unless his hands freed those bound limbs, his father’s death was as certain as though he himself killed him now.

He would release him and seek with him this place of safety. Then they would fly together from the country. In some place remote from the scenes of his sins his father would repent.

Instead of seeking any longer—now—to obtain “the King’s Pardon,” he would help his father to seek—they would seek together—father, mother, and son would all seek together somewhere—the pardon of the King of kings.

“Quick, I tell you. Set me free.”

“Yes—*father!* I cannot let you die if I can save you. But you will let the old life die, won’t you? You will repent, and lead a new one, won’t you?”

“Yes, yes—anything. But be quick.”

Bart tried to unravel the tight fastenings of the ropes—but he couldn’t. His fingers quivered so. He drew his knife and cut them through.

Arber vaulted into the saddle.

“Up!” he cried. “You’re in the same hole now as I am, for they’ll hang you too if they get a chance—for having set me free.”

Without a word Bart sprang up behind him: and together they rode away.

Dick had said sufficient to give Arber—who knew the country for whole tracts around as none else but the natives knew it—a fairly accurate idea of the ground which the police and their companions were working in search of him and—for very different reasons and purposes—for Bart. Needless to say he headed to give them the slip.

He rode pitilessly, sparing the horse nothing, notwithstanding its double burden.

He drew rein for the first time when they

reached the brink of a river which he knew to be too deep to ford.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Bart, who dismounted and swam across without another word, his father swimming the horse over.

They continued their way under cover of the high bank that ran along the other side of the water-course. Presently it became apparent to Bart that they were making for the now not-distant mountains. Would the horse hold out until they reached them?

When they gained at last the foot of the hills, there was yet sufficient time for the ascent before the darkness would fall.

With an oath and a curse as for a moment it hesitated, Arber put his panting and steaming steed at the first portion of the climb. It struggled gallantly up until it reached a ridge some hundreds of feet from the plain.

"Down with you," he ordered Bart. "We must do the rest on foot. This horse might betray us. Lend me your pistol. Is it loaded?"

"Yes."

Bart, who after the appearance of his rescuers had repossessed himself of his belongings, drew his pistol. The elder Arber took the weapon, held it between the poor beast's tired and patient eyes, and fired. The horse, dead, rolled down the fissure on the brink of which it had been pulled up. Arber put the smoking pistol in his own pocket.

“When we want horses,” he said, “we shall have to steal them. They’re no good where we’re going.”

On and up toiled the two tired and silent travelers on foot. Just before darkness fell they reached their destination—a cave nearly half-way to the mountain’s rocky summit. The entrance was narrow and difficult of access : and considering the “path” by which they had had to travel to reach it, the spot deserved its description as a safe place of refuge.

Arber struck a light from his tinder box and led the way inside.

A few yards from the low and narrow entrance, which he had had to stoop to enter, Bart found himself in a lofty and spacious cavern, which bore plain signs of having been recently tenanted. A roughly-made table and some roughly-made seats were the only articles of furniture, but moss and dried leaves, in little heaps, marked off a number of sleeping-places.

“From this cave there are cuttings into two inner ones,” said the bushranger, applying the light to a couple of clumsy candles, home-made from sheep’s fat. “It was from here we started the other day, and it’s here I’ve hidden snug enough more than once when I’ve been missed, as well as wanted, at Digg’s Gully. Are you hungry?”

“No. I’ve not tasted food since last night, but I can’t eat.”

"Drink, then," said Arber, bringing a bottle of spirits and a couple of glasses from a ledge of rock and placing them on the table.

"I've never touched a drop of liquor in my life," said Bart.

"Good boy ! But I have, and I hope to swallow plenty more," the other replied, as he threw half a glass of the unwatered whiskey down his throat.

Collecting some scraps of food, he flung them on the table, and sat down, roughly, but not unkindly, bidding his companion draw up opposite to him.

Bart tried to eat a few mouthfuls, but the effort soon failed.

He gazed intently upon the face of the man who had that day, in such terrible circumstances, proclaimed himself his father.

"I thought I should know my father's face whenever and wherever I saw it," he thought. "If remembrance failed, how was it that instinct was blind ?" But the eyes—in shape and color, though not in expression—the eyes that bore his scrutiny so calmly *were* like the eyes he remembered. So was the shape of this man's head and body and the color of his hair. And the shaggy growth that covered lips and cheeks would make so great a difference. And besides, that awful sentence—"Do the hulks, a convict transport ship, the chains of a felon, leave a man as he was ?"

"Look here, boy," said the subject of his scrutiny and his thoughts, "the sooner you part com-

pany once and for ever with the hope that you're half tempted to indulge in—yes, *hope*, curse you!—the sooner we shall begin to understand each other and what's before us. Question me as much as you like to-morrow, as I shall question you. But for to-night, as you won't eat and can't drink, lie down. Lie down, I tell you—sleep where you like. And don't kiss me, or try to. Kissing's been out of my way so long that now I've no fancy for it. Lie down. I shall follow your example when I've finished the bottle—and not before."

The heart-broken boy—he was still little more than a boy—retired to a far corner and flung himself down.

He rose again, knelt, and tried to pray.

A shout—almost a shriek—of mocking laughter rang through the cave: from—God help him!—the lips of his own father, who had himself first taught him how to pray—from the lips of the now half-drunken and maddened thief, robber, murderer, who had that morning—only that morning, but how long ago it seemed—claimed him as his son.

Only they two were in that lonely mountain cave, but it seemed to Bart that his mother was there also, and that Katie Caines—his little golden-haired sweetheart—was there with her. They were there to hear that unholy laughter, see that evil, passion-inflamed face.

Was it for this that he had twice left home, left

that gentle mother's side to dare the dangers of sea and land? Was it for this that he had faced the chances of perilous journeys by day and by night? Had he come so far, done so much, to find his father in the person of this brutalized outlaw?

He closed his eyes as though to shut out from his shrinking vision that pale face with the awful look upon it—his mother's face. Katie seemed holding out her hands in farewell to him, the while she turned from him. He must see her nevermore—now. Would to God he had found his father dying or dead—loaded with chains in the vilest prison-cell, suffering but innocent—found him anywhere, anyhow—rather than that he had found him—like this.

Unjust though his original conviction had been proved to be, how could he ever take this man into the pure and holy presence of that waiting wife and mother whose tender soul had already borne so heavy a load of shame and grief?

How dare the son of such a man ever seek to speak again to the sweet and innocent girl the thought and hope of whom had been so sweet?

At the sound of another peal of ribald laughter he sprang to his feet. Again the wild idea, the desperate hope, seized him that he had been deceived. Why had he been asked no questions of mother and of home? Why had this man been silent on subjects that *must* be so near the heart of a husband and father?

He moved quickly to Arber's side and laid his hand upon him as he cried passionately :

"You lie : you are not my father !"

The convict flung the lad's hand from his shoulder, rose, and staggered to a box that lay on the ground near the head of one of the rude beds. From this he threw on the table a number of letters—some open, some still sealed.

"I told you to ask and answer questions to-morrow—if you won't wait, satisfy yourself now."

"My mother's writing," gasped Bart with a sob—"these are my mother's letters."

"Yes, to me. I got tired of opening them at last. Ha ! ha ! ha ! look what has fallen from the letter in your hand. It's a lock of your own hair, that she sent me years ago. And now—you unbelieving and unfilial boy—if you want a still more gratifying proof, there's a Government Certificate for you."

Bart took up the paper thrown at him. It was the "Ticket of Leave" granting conditional liberty to William Arber (Convict Number 2,703), of whom it gave a detailed description.

"Look at me again—the description tallies in every particular, I believe ?"

"Yes," replied Bart, slowly and with white lips. "You *are* my father."

CHAPTER XXII.

BACK TO SYDNEY.

WHEN the shepherd, Dick, and his companion returned to Cameron's they had a strange story to report. They told how they had found Bart and captured Black bird Bill, and had then started to collect the scattered divisions of the search party. Almost the entire body reached together the spot where the prisoner had been left in Bart Arber's charge, only to find that the bonds of the former had been cut, and that both had disappeared. All save themselves had again started in the eager hope of finding the trail of the runaways and running them to earth. They two had returned to report what had happened.

Only one idea was entertained about Bart Arber—he was a traitor “to be shot at sight”; the evidence against him was conclusive.

Dick was the spokesman of the pair, and his hurried and angry talk with Mr. Cameron was overheard by Bob Simmons and Faggles. Bob lay in bed in the room adjoining that in which were Cameron and his men, only a wooden partition dividing the two compartments, and Faggles was with him.

Wounded as he was, weak as he was from loss of blood, Bob sprang from his couch and stalked into the other room, dressing himself as he went.

"Whoever says a word against my chum says it against me," he exclaimed.

"Then we do say it against you," said Cameron hotly. "Against the three of you," he went on as he caught sight of Faggles. "The facts that these men have come back to report weigh against everything else."

"Scuttle your facts!" said Bob illogically, in a voice that gained strength as he proceeded. "I've heard just what you've heard, and I say that my mate is innocent, whatever he's done. The real facts will only come out when the log's finished. It ain't finished yet. I'm going to help finish it."

"How?" asked Cameron dryly.

"I'll tell you. This boy that you're talking of, this boy you call a traitor, this lad you're talking of shooting at sight, same as though he was a skunk or a kangaroo, is my mate. I swore to stick to him through thick and thin, and I'm going to do it. I love him like a brother, and woe betide the lubber who hurts a hair of his head while I'm standing by. There's a mystery—and he's lost. I'm going to find him. When I find him the fog'll be cleared up. I'm going out o' this house to find my mate."

"And I'm going with you," declared Faggles.

"Bravo, Faggles my hearty!"

"Suppose I prevent your going?" said Cameron to Bob.

"If you try that game on, you'll have to fight a wounded man—a man wounded in defending your home. Are you going to do it? The wounded man's quite ready."

"No," was the slow response.

Simmons turned to little Faggles.

"Mate," he said, "you know the risks. D'ye mean it that you're going to share 'em?"

"Yes," replied Faggles pluckily. "But you can't start now—you're not fit to leave your bed."

"There's no bunk for me while my mate's lost and hunted. I'll beat about till I get on his track, and then I'll stand by him to the end. I'm going to get under way at once. I can stand anyway, and I'll go on till I drop. And then I'll get up and go on again."

Scarcely another word passed. Bob and Faggles picked up their arms and their few other personal belongings and, the former leading, strode out of the squatter's house. Then Bob turned, and said his last words to the settler.

"Hark'ee, Mr. Cameron, I'm going to find my mate. If I find him, let them as finds him afterwards look to their own skins if so be as they come to harm him while I'm alongside of him. I've been a peaceable man all my life, but to defend my mate I'll fight every white and every black in Australia."

“And I’ll take ’em on afterwards,” piped Faggles valiantly.

Bart’s two brave friends scarcely knew which way to strike after they had cleared the settlement.

“Bobo’s the fellow we want,” said Bob. “He steers with a rudder such as no white chap’s fitted with.”

“I saw him about the place this morning—I’ll run back, and try to catch him, while you sit down and rest,” offered Faggles.

“Try a cooie first,” suggested Bob. “My pipes ain’t in good whistling order yet.”

“Cooie . . ee . . Cooie . . ee ! ”

The call was repeated a number of times before it was answered—not by another white fellow’s “cooie” but by Bobo the black fellow in person.

“This is a slice of good luck,” said Bob as the “friendly chappee” came up to them.

It appeared that Bobo, who had been scouting on his own account in his own mysterious way during the recent period of further excitement, knew whereabouts it was that Bart and the bush-ranger had been discovered, and at once agreed to show them the way. This spot would have to be their starting point on the new trail, if it could be found.

“White fellow walk slow,” said the black, pointing to Bob Simmons, “or plenty soon not walk at all.”

Bob bore up wonderfully, but soon found himself unable to proceed at anything but a pace so

laggardly that his hardy and impatient spirit chafed at the slow progress the little party made. Faggles insisted, too, on an early halt for the night. In the morning the sailor declared himself stronger and better, and proved it by marching sturdily on till the sought-for place was reached. Here a consultation was held, the result being that Bobo was despatched by himself to search for any signs of the direction in which the fugitives had flown.

It was night before he returned. He reported in the first place that the trail was hopelessly lost only a mile or two away, and in the second place that the chase had been abandoned by the police and their companions, at all events for the present, for they had started on their way back to Cameron's.

Bobo's white friends never asked him now how he obtained his news, for on this point he had never anything to say but that they had no eyes. He followed up the information he had brought with a startling proposition. It was that Bob and Faggles should remain where they were for about a week, while he went off somewhere. They were to wait his return.

"Where are you going to make for;" asked Bob a little suspiciously.

"White fellow never mind. No matter to white fellow," replied Bobo. "One, two, one two, one, two days. White fellows wait plenty long time. Then black fellow come back and tell."

“He means by his ‘one, two, one, two, one, two,’ that we’re to wait here for him about six days,” said Faggles.

“But where’s he going? In this here outlandish sort of maneuvering the little cuss is worth anything. What does he want to part company with us for?” wondered Bob. “Look here, Bobo. We’ve got our make-thunder pieces, and plenty of powder and shot, and plenty much ‘baccy. Stop with us and help us, and you shall make a beast of yourself by eating too much whenever you like, and have more than your whack o’ baccy throwed in.”

Bobo shook his head at this generous suggestion.

“Wait one, two, one, two, one, two days,” he repeated. “Then I come and tell you, and eat plenty much, and have plenty much ‘baccee.”

With some difficulty—for he appeared to be in a peculiarly obstinate mood—he at last divulged his plan.

It was certain that Bart and the chief of the bushranging gang were together. It was equally certain that the object of the latter was to reach a place of refuge. Bobo had heard a rumor about the existence of such a place of refuge, of which the gang had before now availed themselves. What more likely-than that Blackbird Bill had again availed himself of it? Bobo believed that if he could find the black fellows of a certain tribe they could tell him the whereabouts of this hiding-place. So he wanted “plenty much time” to go

away and find them, to obtain this invaluable information. But he wouldn't be hindered and bothered on the way by a pair of eyeless white fellows.

"Bobo," said Simmons solemnly, "you're a brick."

Bobo didn't understand the wording of the compliment, but he grasped the spirit of it.

"Friendly chappee," he grinned. "But"—here a thoughtful look appeared upon his face, and he put his hand to his head—"white fellow and lost white fellow plenty good to black fellow plenty long time ago. Patch him head."

"And a grateful little beggar you've turned out," murmured Bob.

It is almost needless to say that Bobo's plan was agreed to. The two white men felt that they were in his hands—without him they were practically helpless. A sailor and a draper in the wilds of Australia, without previous experience there, were certain to be nonplussed by difficulties which were easily surmountable by a native.

Bobo returned on the night of the fifth day. During his absence Bob had almost recovered. He gave himself out as now again "fit for anything." Faggles had nursed him up as far as was possible in the shelter they had constructed of branches and twigs, and made heroic endeavors to do the shooting for the larder department, so that his friend should have absolute rest. He actually managed to hit one bird, and the day he did it

was a red-letter day in his experience. For weeks afterwards he spoke of it as "the day I killed a cockatoo."

Bobo refused all information till he had had too much to eat, after which he had a great deal too much 'baccee to smoke.

Then he announced that he had obtained the information he went to seek, and a start at daybreak was decided on.

They crossed the water at almost the same spot as that at which Bart and Arber had crossed, continued up the course of the river on the opposite bank, and made for the foot of the mountains on about the same course as that laid by the convict. They slept that night where they found themselves, and began the ascent early next morning.

It was soon evident that Bobo was much less at home on the hillside than he was on the plains and in the forests. He appeared to be searching for landmarks which he was unable to find. Keeping well ahead, "he's all eyes and nose," said Bob. Late in the afternoon they arrived—but without knowing it—in the locality they were searching for—that in which was the cave where Bart and his father continued in hiding. Save for an occasional excursion in quest of food, they remained day and night in their shelter till such time as the hue and cry after them should die down.

"By and by they'll give us up for dead," had said Arber, "and then I have my own plans for

getting safely to the coast. These mountains are thought to be impassable, but a few of us know differently. On the eastern side every man's hand will be against us, but on the western side we shall never see a white face except each other's. At the right spot lower down you'll recross the range by yourself and get into Sydney, where you'll buy all the materials for a complete disguise. You'll return to me with these, and in some very different character I'll re-enter Sydney with you. Then we'll catch the first ship that's going anywhere."

"Yes, father," Bart had replied, "any ship that's going anywhere from this terrible country. It doesn't matter where you begin a new life. And by and by we will either go to mother, or send for her, and we will all ask for God's mercy and forgiveness and help together. But if the other side of the mountains is so safe, why delay? Why not begin our journey at once?"

"For a very good reason. Some of the police may try this side of the range up to a certain height, and some of those rascally blacks might show them how to cross. Our game is to lie low till it's certain that the present alarm has died down, and the actual search for us been abandoned."

His black body showing conspicuously against the whitey-gray crags, Bobo stood on a ledge peering closely around him. Faggles and Bob were coming up some few hundreds of yards below.

Suddenly the sound of a shot rang out in the quivering sunlight, followed by one sharp scream of pain as Bobo threw up his arms, gave a spring into the air, and fell to the ground.

Bob Simmons was first to reach the spot. When Faggles joined him he was holding the poor little black fellow in his arms, and trying to stanch the blood that was pouring from his naked breast. Bobo opened his eyes and gazed straight into the big, brave, tender eyes of the sailor, now swimming with tears.

"Friendly chappee," he gasped, with a last smile.

Bob laid him gently down, and raised his cap from his own head.

"He's dead," he said.

"They've come!" cried Arber in a voice of wild alarm as he burst into the cave. "A black fellow was leading. I shot him—in another second he'd have seen me. Two whites were following him—I saw them. Others must have been close behind. Roll up those stones to the entrance of the cave, and load every fire-arm we've got."

Bart leaped to his feet.

"Father, I've thought of this. I'm prepared to face every danger to save you, and I'll stand by you to the last. But against the friends and agents of the law I will not fire a shot or strike a blow, come what will."

"Then, by ——, I'll strike one at you"—and Arber grasped his musket and was in the very act of clubbing it when Bart seized his wrist and held it in a grip of iron. "Listen to me," he cried. "I have an idea that the poor fellow you shot and his two companions were not enemies but friends."

"Friends! What friends would be in search of you and me?"

"My friends. It will be well for both of us if my hope proves to be not a false one. I'm going out alone and unarmed to discover for myself whether we are tracked by your pursuers or by my friends. In the former case, let them shoot me—they will only be doing their duty. In the latter case, it will be well for you as well as for me, as I said just now, for I can count upon them."

Bart rushed for the mouth of the cave, but his father planted himself in front of him.

"I'll shoot you rather than let you go," he cried. "Your talk about your friends is moonshine—and anyway your friends are not my friends, and I won't have our hiding-place betrayed to any 'friends' of yours. You stop where you are. The place where I shot the black fellow is a long way off, and it'll puzzle any of 'em to find their way here. Even if they do they'll have their work cut out to get inside through the defile alive. I won't be taken while we've got a bullet left to keep the gulley clear."

Bart hesitated. Even if Bob Simmons and Faggles had found their way to him, what had he to do with them now? He felt that *he* couldn't be doing wrong in trying to smuggle his own father safely from the scene of his crimes, but what right—what moral right—had any one else to help him in doing so? What right had he to ask any one so to help him? If ever he and Bob met again he would tell him all and thus explain his desertion. Both Simmons and Faggles would find their way back to Sydney as well without as with him. His duty—his bitter duty—was to save his father if he could. But he must do it alone. Without a word he turned to and helped to block the entrance to the cave.

For three days they remained there unmolested, and then sallied cautiously forth, crossed the summit of the range, and turned their faces southwards.

On the evening of the day of his death Bob and his companion carried the body of Bobo down into the plain at the foot of the hill and buried it.

“Poor little fellow?” said Simmons ingenuously, “I own he ate too much, but he did his duty—by us at all events. Too many Whites seem to think these black fellows was only made for them to shoot and kick, but where should we have been without poor Bobo? When Blacks and Browns from half the world over are heard

against Whites at the Last Day, there'll be some heavy reckonings to settle."

They turned sorrowfully from the grave, and discussed their plans. Although the fate of the murdered Bobo—shot by an unseen and undiscoverable hand—proved the risk of the undertaking, they resolved to continue by themselves the search they had started to prosecute. For days they did so. Close as more than once they were to the hidden cave they failed to find it, or any trace of those they sought. Then they wandered farther away, and at last abandoning all hope, started back on foot to Sydney, which they reached after suffering a good deal of hardship and a good many privations.

Faggles's references to Rebecca became more numerous and increasingly eulogistic the farther they advanced on their return journey. She received her husband with stoical indifference, and remarked that the business had got on much better without him.

The journey of the two Arbers was a terrible one, but at last it, too, approached its end. Ragged and footsore, Bart entered Sydney by himself, and made the purchases that had been decided on. When he re-entered it—himself re-attired—he was accompanied by ex-convict No. 2,703, who carried off very well his assumed character of a prosperous up-country settler.

The only ship flying the blue Peter was the bark *Eva Bryant*, bound for London. Bart

would have preferred to sail for a foreign instead of a home port, but rather than run the awful risks of delay he (adopting the name of Talbot for the time being) took two passages by the bark and hurried his father safely aboard, having previously drawn the balance of his money and paid the captain. He himself returned ashore to make inquiries as to Bob Simmons and Faggles. As he wended his way towards the latter's store, a glad hail greeted his ears in the former's unmistakable voice. In another moment the strong right hands of the two old friends were clasped together in a close grip.

In a few broken sentences Bart told his miserable story.

"I wouldn't try to find you, though I took it for granted you had returned to Sydney, Bob, till I'd got him safely aboard. But now"—with a glance towards the fluttering blue Peter of the *Eva Bryant* in the harbor—"there's no fear of your being made an accessory even after the fact."

The other understood him. He didn't speak—but he wrung the poor lad's hand eloquently again and again. Then he began to walk steadily towards the harbor.

"Where are you going, Bob?"

"To ship aboard the bark along o' you, lad—not as a passenger this time, but a hand."

"No—with me as a passenger. I want you, Bob—I need you in my trouble—and what should I see of you as a hand?"

But Captain Rogers demurred to taking another passenger.

"Besides yourself and your father, Mr. Talbot," he said, "you know I have a third gentleman to carry already, and he promises to give as much trouble as six ought to give. He has a cabin to himself, and fancies himself an invalid. As I told you, he has actually insisted on going home by way of the outward route instead of round the Horn. When I asked him his reasons he asked me my price—and paid it. The old gentleman told me when he first came aboard that he had left England for a change because he found himself in a rapid consumption. Within the last week he has detected in himself the symptoms of three other diseases, of which he seems very proud. I really believe that he's paid to go to England round the Cape of Good Hope because he thinks there'll be time to catch more diseases that way than by the other route. He's got a medicine chest bigger than mine. I really don't think I can stow your friend Mr. Simmons anywhere."

But gold had its usual effect, and before they left the ship the extra passage was taken and paid for.

A farewell visit was paid to Faggles and Rebecca. Their late companion in the bush insisted upon it that they should sleep at his house that night, and in the morning he accompanied them on board.

When the ship started the good little man, his

face streaming with tears, stood on the wharf waving his handkerchief frantically, wiping his eyes with it at intervals.

Soon the blue waves rippled about the bark's bows as she moved rapidly through the water.

“Thank God !” said Bart. “It doesn't matter to us what course is steered.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACOB MELLING.

FOR the first few days at sea nothing was seen of the eccentric passenger of whom the captain had spoken. He kept his cabin.

"But he really is ill this time," said Captain Rogers with a smile. "He's enjoying himself with an attack of sea-sickness. At least, it isn't so much sea-sickness he's suffering from as the things he's swallowed, first to prevent it and then to cure it."

On the fifth morning, as Bart, Bob Simmons (whose quiet and retiring demeanor in company always told its own tale of the native "gentlemanliness" of his character), the captain, and the bark's first officer, Mr. Harry Potter, were seated at breakfast, the door opened, and in walked the hitherto invisible invalid—a rather spare and rather tall, sharp, spruce-looking, and carefully-dressed old gentleman, who might have been put down as having used up some sixty-five years.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said in a crisp and rather pleasant voice, as he drew to the table and took a seat. "I hope I see you all well."

"Are *you* well, sir? I hope you have recovered?" said Rogers.

"From *nausea marina*, yes, captain, thank you. But I expect an attack of *Epistaxis* every minute. I've been subject to it all my life, gentlemen," said the old fellow proudly.

"Let me introduce two of your fellow passengers, sir—Mr. Talbot, junior; Mr. Simmons."

Either Captain Rogers failed to mention the third name, or Bart and Bob, as they bowed to its owner, failed to catch it.

"Glad to make your acquaintance. I hope to improve it upon the voyage. But I do not expect to reach England alive. I should not be surprised to find myself carried off by Epilepsy. Sudden loss of consciousness, followed by sleep—depression of spirits—gloomy moods—drowsiness—the *aura epileptica*, a peculiar sensation which may be compared to a stream of air, the trickling of water, or the creeping of an insect—such are the symptoms, and I can feel them coming on. I will take two more eggs, captain, if you please—while they continue fresh."

"You have suffered a good deal, sir, from ill-health?" remarked Bart.

"I have had more diseases, young gentleman, than you know the names of—and I am still young enough to suffer from a number of others," said the invalid in very cheerful tones. "If a new disease were discovered to-morrow, I should expect to catch it the day after."

"Is your father keeping his berth this morning, Mr. Talbot?" put in Captain Rogers, who thought that the exhibition of his passenger's mania had gone far enough.

"He was not up when I left him," replied Bart. "He complained of a headache."

"*Cephalalgia*," said the old gentleman instantly. "I've had more headache, longer headaches, and worse headaches than any man living. I don't suppose your father knows what a real headache is."

"He's terribly jealous of anybody else being ill," whispered Mr. Potter to Bob, who could hardly keep his countenance. "Hulloa! what's he up to now?" he added, as the subject of his remark suddenly rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen, I am subject to Ague. Will you kindly excuse me while I retire to my cabin and have a brief attack?"

At that moment the door again swung open, and in walked William Arber, just as the old gentleman turned to leave. They met face to face.

An exclamation burst from the lips of each, and each stepped quickly and affrightedly back, Arber with a terrible imprecation.

"Stop the ship!" almost screamed the other. "Put back the ship! My life is not safe with that man on board. He's an escaped convict."

"For God's sake," pleaded Bart piteously, as every one sprang to his feet, "for God's sake, sir,

come apart with me. For God's sake let me speak to you."

"Put back the ship!"

"What is the matter—are you mad, Mr. Stencil?" cried Captain Rogers.

"Stencil!" exclaimed Bart, his memory flashing back to Michael Black's confession.

"Yes, sir—Stencil; late head of the robbed and defrauded firm that prosecuted this man. He's a felon and his name is JACOB MELLING!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE COMPLETE.

BEFORE a hand could be raised to stop him, the fellow rushed at Mr. Stencil. Just in time Mr. Potter darted between them and received full in his own face the furious blow aimed at the old passenger.

The first officer instantly knocked his aggressor flat on his back with a single return blow, delivered straight from his powerful shoulder.

"Neat," said Bob Simmons, his fingers beginning to itch to join in ; "very neat indeed."

"Deck, there," roared the skipper. "Clap that man in irons," he ordered as his call was answered, pointing to the form still recumbent on the floor. The command was promptly obeyed, and order restored. In the presence of the two officers of the ship, his accuser, Bart and Bob, the man who had declared himself to be William Arber stood handcuffed.

"If you are not deceived in your identification of this man as an escaped convict, Mr. Stencil, it is a most fortunate thing—although you would have done almost equally well—that he struck my officer," said Captain Rogers.

"Is it?" queried the first mate, fingering an ugly bump between his eyes.

"Certainly; for it justifies me in putting him in irons which I could only have done on Mr. Stencil's charge after the strongest evidence."

"Where is his evidence?" demanded the prisoner. "Is this the way an Englishman is to be treated on board an English ship? Set me free, and I'll thrust his lie down his throat. My name is William Arber."

"Arber! Then why did you take your passages in the name of Talbot?" said Rogers. Then he turned sharply to Bart, and asked abruptly: "You did that—why?"

"If Mr. Stencil can prove what he has said," replied Bart, "I'll tell you."

"I won't speak in the presence of that man, Jacob Melling," declared Mr. Stencil; "I can't. His threatening looks are paralyzing my nerve centers, and bringing on palpitation of the heart. Let him be removed, and I will speak."

"Am I to be tried in my absence?" said Melling with a sneer.

"I'm not in a position to try you at all," replied Captain Rogers. "But I'm going to hear what this gentleman has to say, and as he won't speak in your presence you're going out."

At a nod of his head the removal was effected as quietly as quickly.

Then Mr. Stencil told his story. He narrated how the firm of Messrs. Stencil, Krooks, and

Warren, of which he was at the time the principal partner, had prosecuted one Jacob Melling, who at the time of his arrest had aggravated his crime by an attack on an officer of the law, and had been sentenced to twenty years' transportation, of which about thirteen had yet to run out.

"Is your identification of my passenger as Jacob Melling an absolutely positive one?" asked Rogers.

"Absolutely positive. I say so without a scintilla of hesitation—without a single shade of doubt. Put the ship back, and hand him over to the authorities at Sydney. I'll warrant that they recognize him."

"Don't talk about putting the ship back—that's impossible and ridiculous," returned the master of the *Eva Bryant*—more emphatically than politely. "It will be my duty to carry him to England and hand him over to the authorities there, who will investigate your statement. But for his violence just now I can keep him in irons, at all events for the present."

"Don't let him out of them on any account," implored the old gentleman. "If you do he'll murder me—and it is my ambition, sir, to die from some well-defined form of disease, not by violence."

Captain Rogers turned inquiringly to Bart Arber.

Conviction, sweet and sure, that Mr. Stencil could not be mistaken had impressed itself upon

our hero's mind. Though the mystery in which his father's fate was involved now appeared darker than ever, the shadow, the horror of the past long weeks was lifted from his young life. A well of gratitude had overflowed in his heart—its waters had bubbled over and filled his eyes.

What he had to tell, he told as briefly as he could. He just told the truth. Even before he quite finished, it was evident that every one sympathized with him and that no one blamed him for what he had done to protect the man whom he believed to be his father. Had he told the story as Bob Simmons would have told it for him, they would have made a hero of him.

"Young gentleman," said Mr. Stencil, "I knew the real William Arber well. Although my firm had to supply some of the evidence upon which he was convicted, I always declared that he was an innocent man. I said so at the time, and I've said so ever since."

"Now, sir, it can be proved—it has been proved—that he was as guiltless a victim as ever suffered for the crime of others."

And, plied with questions, Bart proceeded to repeat some portions of his strange story at greater length.

Melling was sent for and escorted back into the cabin, old Mr. Stencil retreating precipitately at his entrance to a safe place behind the captain and Mr. Potter.

To none of the interrogations addressed to him

would the prisoner make any response beyond a demand to be set free. Save for this, he maintained a sullen silence.

"Keep him in irons, whatever you do," recommended Mr. Stencil repeatedly.

"Well, considering your identification of him as a felon, his own claim to the name of another convict—however unjustly sentenced—the story we have just heard from you, Mr. . . . Mr. Arber, his silence now, his previous personal violence, and his threats, I shall continue to keep him under restraint—at least until he chooses to open his mouth," decided the captain.

The prisoner was again removed, and by-and-by, when the excitement had subsided, the skipper and his officer went on deck, Mr. Stencil to his cabin—presumably to enjoy his deferred attack of ague—and Bart and Bob were left alone.

"Oh, Bob, thank God, that my first instinct—the first instinct of my heart that prompted me to disbelieve in that man's terrible claim to be my father—thank God that now the instinct has been justified."

"Yes, Bart ; I say with you, thank God."

"But what can I do, where can I turn now, to solve the mystery of my father's fate? Where is he? This man Melling—for he *is* Melling, he is *not* my father—was received at the convict settlement as William Arber, released on ticket-of-leave as William Arber—he had my mother's letters addressed to William Arber."

“But all the same, as you say, he is not William Arber. He passed as your father for some purpose of his own.”

“Of that, of course, there can be no doubt. Nor can there be much doubt but that the secret of my father’s disappearance is known to him.”

“Get it out of him. Leave him alone at present—let the irons break him down a bit. Then try your hardest to get him to speak.”

“I will, Bob. And even though I may never succeed in finding my father, or even finding what became of him, I say again, thank God for the revelation of this morning, for I can hold my head up once more. If he is still alive, I have faith to believe that I shall find him yet. If he is dead, at least his memory will soon be cleared of every stain.”

Days and weeks passed. Jacob Melling was still kept under partial restraint—he still refused to speak. All Bart’s efforts to make him open his lips failed.

So far the weather had been fine, and the progress of the bark as rapid as the prevailing westerly winds allowed. But now came a change. Storms and hurricanes drove the bark far out of her course. They beat so furiously upon her that the greatest fears began to be entertained. In the many emergencies of the long spell of danger the willing services of Bob Simmons and Bart were gratefully accepted by Captain Rogers, for the ship was not too well manned.

"I knew you were a seaman the moment I clapped eyes on you," said he to the former, "but I didn't give the youngster credit for being such a smart sailor-man after so short an experience."

"He's got the makings in him of as fine a seaman as ever trod a deck," replied Bob.

When at length the weather moderated, the first thing to be done was to set about repairs before the bark could again be put upon her course. When the morning broke after the last night of storm, she was found to be close to a little group of islands, not marked upon the chart. To the leeward of these she anchored, and, while the repairs were put in hand, parties of men were landed to seek for fresh water and edible green-meat. They returned with both, and reported the islands habitable, though apparently uninhabited. They were soft with verdure and bright with tropical flowers.

Mr. Stencil had kept his cabin during all the bad weather, suffering, or enjoying, an unequalled combination of imaginary illnesses. He now came on deck, and gazed with delight upon the little Paradise of the Islands.

"You'd better go ashore, sir, and stretch your legs," said Mr. Potter.

"I will—at once, if you can spare a boat and a man to row me."

"I'll do that, Mr. Stencil," put in Bart, springing into a boat alongside. His "fare" followed him, and they pulled away for the shore.

Before they reached it an incident occurred to which Mr. Stencil ever afterwards attached great importance, though Bart tried to laugh it off as "a mere nothing." Owing entirely to the old gentleman's awkwardness the boat capsized, and its two occupants were thrown into the water. Mr. Stencil drifted a little way off, but Bart perceiving that he could not swim, was soon up with him, and supported him until the boat was regained and righted.

"Row me back to the ship at once. I must take instant precautions to prevent Catarrh, Rheumatics, Bronchitis, Pleurisy, Pneumonia, and Phthisis. I expect to have 'em all," he added in a pleased tone of voice.

"Why, how can a bit of a ducking in warm water like this hurt you? I rather enjoyed it."

"Then in that case you'd better fall in again," snapped Bart's dripping companion; "only please row me on board first."

Bart did as he was requested, and then had an hour on the island by himself.

When he returned Mr. Stencil grasped him by the hand.

"Young man," he said, "you have to-day saved my life—for days, perhaps for weeks. I shall not forget it."

That night Jacob Melling spoke at last. He sent for Bart and made a startling proposition.

"I am the only man you'll ever meet in this

world who can tell you what became of your father," he said.

"Then you confess that you are Jacob Melting?" exclaimed Bart eagerly.

"I'll confess nothing till my conditions are agreed to. But I repeat that I'm the only man you'll ever meet who can tell you what you want to know. What's more, if he is still alive"

He repeated the words as he saw the light of hope leap into the lad's face.

"If he is still alive I'm the only man to tell you where to seek for him."

"Tell me all—tell me everything you know. When did you see him? Where is he? Quick, quick, man—how slow you are!"

"Softly, please, and not so fast. Before I open my mouth, my conditions must be agreed to absolutely."

"What are they? Quick, I tell you. What are they?"

"Very simple ones. If I'm carried to any English port and handed over, I shall be hanged. Therefore I don't want to be taken to any English port. The islands here to which we have drifted are habitable. When the bark makes sail, let me be put ashore, with provisions, stores, a musket, powder and shot, and a boat. If I can't live I must die, but I want the chance. If you persuade the captain to pledge me his word that my conditions are granted I'll speak."

Without a word Bart sought the captain

and implored him to consent to the arrangement.

"Villain as he is," he urged, "he will surely be as powerless for evil on these islands as in his grave. They are so far out of the tracks of ships that he will never have any chance worth taking into account of mingling with his fellow-creatures again—and here he can wrong no one. In the circumstances, surely we shall all be justified in allowing him to escape."

"Captain Rogers hesitated. Then he said, "Let us all talk this matter over together."

Bart speedily summoned Mr. Potter, Mr. Stencil, and Bob Simmons.

The two last-named earnestly joined with Bart in pressing the acceptance of Melling's offer, but the two officers had some qualms as to how the episode would look in the log-book.

"I've got it!" cried Mr. Stencil. "Let me see Jacob Melling at once. Is he still in irons?"

"No; he's in confinement, but not in irons."

"Then iron him at once," said the old gentleman, speaking as though the prisoner was a shirt just home from the wash. "Iron him at once. I'll speak to him, but daren't go near him unless he's in irons. I want to speak to him alone, so he *must* be made safe."

Melling was handcuffed for the interview, which was a very brief one.

"It's all right," announced Mr. Stencil, returning from it. "He's prepared to come in and make

his statement. I respect your scruples, Captain Rogers, but I've overcome them."

"I wasn't aware of it," said the captain dryly.

"But you must waive them—or rather there will now be no need for them. When do we sail?"

"I hope the day after to-morrow."

"Good. If when the night of that day comes—or say the next day—you find that despite all your precautions this man has got off the ship, will it be your duty to put back for him, to make sure whether he's drowned or simply escaped? Will it be your duty to put back after a missing boat?"

"No."

The two men looked hard at each other.

"Then will you order him to be brought in—handcuffed?"

"Yes," said Captain Rogers.

Jacob Melling spoke slowly and deliberately. As he spoke, the master of the *Eva Bryant*, log-book before him, wrote :

"I am Jacob Melling. Early in the year 1803, I was prosecuted by the house of Messrs. Stencil, Krooks, and Warren, London, for fraud and embezzlement. As I was charged at the same time with wounding one of the officers who arrested me, I expected to be hanged. As it was, I was lucky, for I got off with the sentence of twenty years' transportation to Botany Bay.

"I recognize in Mr. Augustus Stencil, pas-

senger by this bark the then head of the firm which prosecuted me. When I reached the hulks they were overcrowded, and hundreds of us were packed off on board the first transport that could be got ready, and a second transport was being loaded as we sailed.

“I will say nothing of the horrors of the voyage before its crowning catastrophe. Towards the latter end of it, we experienced the same sort of weather as this bark has lately gone through. Like her, we were driven before furious gales far out of our course. I speak as a landsman when I say that I calculate we were at last within a few hundred miles of what I understand to be the present position of this bark.

“Loaded with chains, linked together like beasts, some raving with fever, we convicts had been battened down below during all the foul weather. During the last few days, dead men remained chained to living men.

“The last night came. In the midst of as wild a storm as any we had gone through, the transport caught fire.

“The crew put off in their boats. Just before deserting the doomed ship they had, the humanity to open the hatches and knock off our chains.

“I have no words to describe the scene that followed, especially after the spirit-room was found and broken open. In the face of death by fire or flood, men fought like demons for the possession

of the two boats that remained. In the struggle my own clothes were torn from my back.

“There was one man who tried to bring the seething, drunken multitude to reason. That man was a convict named William Arber, sentenced to fourteen years. I knew him years before. He had been suffering from fever, and was in the lazaretto. He rushed from it almost naked, and exhorted us to keep order, and to commence lashing rafts together. He might as well have spoken to the wind that was fanning the flames that were now beginning to leap up the rigging.

“We got the two boats launched somehow, and as many of us as could beat off the others scrambled into them. Arber disappeared for a few moments. Just before we shoved off he came to the ship's side, and threw into the boat in which I was all sorts of articles, which we found useful enough before long. Amongst them was his own jacket, which I seized.

“The two boats got off. One was swamped. Ours pulled safely away. The storm was rapidly dying down and we lived through what remained of it. All night long we saw the glare of the burning transport, so she didn't go down before daylight. Before then some of her convicts may have got off by means of rafts and spars.

“Three days afterwards—she having also been driven from her proper course—we were picked up by the second transport ship I have referred to.

I believe that it was because I was wearing William Arber's jacket that a certain idea came to me as we were taken aboard. William Arber's sentence was fourteen years, mine twenty. Running the only risk of some of my fellow-convicts splitting upon me, I reported myself as William Arber, and as William Arber I was handed over when the ship reached Port Jackson. I played my cards to get an early ticket-of-leave, and as William Arber I received it. Strangely enough, we were not dissimilar in appearance. As William Arber, I of course received the letters of the real William Arber's wife.

"My motives in continuing to pose as William Arber when I met his son searching for his father in the bush must be apparent. By doing so I secured my own escape from impending execution, and then his help in getting out of the country. That is all."

"No, it isn't all," cried Bart.

"What more do you want?"

"I told you in Australia of Michael Black—you read a copy of his confession. You have not said one word about being the prime mover in the dastardly crime by which you and Black compassed my innocent father's ruin. Indorse that confession with a statement that every word of it is true, or all that it is in my power to do I will do to induce the captain of this ship to carry you to your fate in England after all."

"And he'll do it," said Captain Rogers.

"Our bargain was that you should tell *all*," insisted Bart, producing from his breast his cherished copy of the document signed by Michael Black the day before his execution.

"What odds can it make to me?" said Jacob Melling, as he coolly indorsed it with the statement demanded.

"One question before you go. What did you mean by saying that only you could tell me where to seek for my father—if he be still alive? What hope does your story leave?"

"I meant nothing more definite than this," replied Melling. "We have just drifted to land where it is possible that human life may be maintained. If William Arber got away from the burning wreck, *he may have done the same.*"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ISLAND GRAVE.

VERY early the following morning Bart and the faithful Bob Simmons—with the same unexpressed idea, the same faint hope, too faint and dim for expression—entered a boat together and pulled off to the nearest and largest island. They hauled the boat up high on the golden beach, and silently searched all round the shores. Then they struck inland, and searched there too.

About the middle of the day they re-entered their craft and rowed across to the nearest other island, and recommenced their keen and patient seeking.

Side by side they walked a few hundred yards from the beach, and then each stopped with a sharp and sudden cry.

In the shadow of a towering tree, overgrown with long green verdure and gleaming with the deep colors of such flowers as we know not in these northern lands, was a grave—a Christian grave, for a neatly-carved wooden cross surmounted the wooden headstone, in which were cut the words :

“ *Here lies WILLIAM ARBER.*

Who died on this Island on October 9th, 1804.”

The trunk of the tree hard by was marked with another cross. Green moss had grown and filled up the incisions. Close to this cross of green a cavity had been bored, and from it, enclosed in a small tin case, Bart drew a paper which bore the following statement.

“On October 9th, 1804, the British trading schooner ‘*Coronet*,’ Sydney to Liverpool via the Cape of Good Hope, made these islands under stress of weather. A signal was seen flying on the beach, and a boat was sent ashore. It was met by two men who stated that they were survivors of the transport *British Monarch*, which was burned and went down about the middle of June last year on the passage to Port Jackson. They gave their names as Arthur Jackson, steward, and John White, cook, and stated that a passenger named Tremayne and a convict named Arber had also escaped on the raft by means of which they had drifted ashore from the wreck of their vessel.

“Both passenger and convict were down with fever in the hut built by the castaways. The convict was dying, and breathed his last before the day was out. We gave him Christian burial on this spot.

“Mr. Tremayne, delirious, we at once carried

on board. Rescuing also Jackson and White, we make sail this day, October 10th.

“SAMUEL ROUNTHWAITE, *Master*.

“ALFRED ANDERSON, *Mate*.”

Bob Simmons walked softly away. Bart Arber knelt by the grave alone.

“How strangely has God led me,” was again his thought—“led me in paths other than those of my own blind seeking. His winds have blown and ships have been driven to this lonely spot in the working-out of His Will and *His* Way.

“ ‘God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform ;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm !’

“Though it has pleased Him to take my dear and wronged and guiltless father to himself, He has placed in my hands the proofs of his innocence, and has led me here to where he sleeps in peace.

“Oh, father, dear, dear father ! My father—my father !”

He bent his head low and kissed the bright flowers upon whose petals his tears gleamed in the southern sunshine like the diamonds of the dew.

Then he raised his streaming eyes to the blue heaven above, the blossom-spangled islands and glittering sea, and said again :

“ My FATHER!—Who art in Heaven—Hallowed be Thy name. . . . *Thy Will be done.*”

Tenderly he broke some of the flowers from their stems and placed them in his bosom.

“ For mother.”

Bart saw Jacob Melling no more—from that pain he saved himself, retiring to his own cabin upon his return to the bark, and remaining there until she sailed away with the daylight.

In the middle watch that night two sailors conducted Melling to a boat alongside. In the boat were all the articles he had stipulated for. He entered, and rowed for the land.

In the deep stillness of the tropical night, the plash of his oars was heard until he reached the beach. But he himself almost instantly disappeared in the darkness—and as he disappeared from the sight of those two listening sailors, he disappeared from the life and ken of his fellow-men forever. And so he now disappears from the pages of this our story.

The pockets of that pair of sailor-men felt very warm. Old Mr. Stencil had concluded a few remarks to them of a strictly private and confidential character by the gift to each of a “ golden guinea.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“RISEN FROM THE DEAD.”

REGAINING her course, the *Eva Bryant* continued her long passage home. The monotony was relieved by little but the startling attack of different diseases of which Mr. Stencil proclaimed himself the victim. There was always some sort of excitement in guessing what the next disease would be.

At last the English Channel was made, up which, the wind being contrary, the bark had tediously to beat. Off Portsmouth the weather was so threatening that Captain Rogers ran in for refuge.

The harbor was crowded with men-o'-war and merchantmen. Amongst the latter was a brig at sight of which Bart's heart beat high. Bob Simmons saw her, and at the same moment each cried :

“The *Leo* !”

A few minutes afterwards they stood on the deck of their old ship.

The reply to their first question conveyed the welcome intelligence that she was still com-

manded by Captain Caines, and that he was on board.

No greeting could have been warmer, no reception more gratifying, than the welcome he gave them.

He listened quietly but eagerly to Bart's stirring story.

"My poor old friend," he murmured, with tears in his eyes, as his friend's son described the far-away grave where his father was lying so peacefully at last—"my poor old friend."

Then he told what he had been doing to procure the King's Pardon. As soon as possible after Bart had left the brig at Bristol he had forwarded the proper representations and affidavits to the right quarter, and had been successful in obtaining the help of powerful influence. An inquiry into the whole case had been promised, and communications that he had since received proved that the promise had been kept.

"Red tape takes a long time in unreeling," he said, "but in starting on my present voyage, now almost over, I had good hopes that the result of our efforts would be known before I returned. We are homeward bound for London—from the West Indies again—and only put in here last night. I'll go with you on board your bark at once. The evidence in the log-book is conclusive, and must be dealt with with as little delay as possible. Though your father himself is lost to you, Bart, my boy, his good name will be restored."

As they left the cabin Bart put a question that had been in his heart since the instant he saw and recognized the *Leo*.

“Captain Caines, is Katie on board with you?”

“No—I left her ashore this voyage.”

He noticed the keen disappointment on his questioner’s face.

“Is she well, sir? Is her health quite restored?”

“She’s better than she ever was before in her life. The sea regularly set her up. You’d hardly know her, she looks so bright and strong.”

“Oh, yes, I should—I should know her however she looked. Where is she, Captain Caines?”

“Why, she’s with”—here a sudden thought occurred to him: he hesitated a moment, and then, with a look partly quizzical and suggestive of a lurking smile hiding away somewhere, added—“a friend on shore.”

“Here?”

“No—not here.”

Bart felt a little hurt and greatly disappointed that Katie’s father seemed by his manner to forbid the question that was on his lips, the answer to which would have told him where his sweetheart was staying.

A long confabulation took place in the captain’s cabin aboard the *Eva Bryant*. Old Mr. Stencil took the liveliest interest in the petition to the Throne, and volunteered his active co-operation in any further steps to be taken.

“Always provided that I continue to exist,” he cautioned his hearers. “Now that I have returned to this abominable climate, I expect to be carried off shortly by rapid consumption of the lungs. I left England to ward it off, but I found that I was contracting so many other diseases during my travels that I thought I might as well return and have pulmonary consumption as die of something else abroad.”

“Very good indeed,” was the hearty but most inappropriate remark of Bob Simmons, who of course was of the party.

“When do you go to your mother? Do you propose to coach it from here or go round to London with the ship?”

“I shall take the coach here, Captain Caines,” replied Bart. “Before I do anything else I must see mother—to tell her with my own lips.”

“I thought that would be your plan—and it’s the best one. But you must not stay in Gorleston long.”

“I don’t intend to, captain. My place will be in London, when I shall first confer with yourself, Mr. Stencil, and Captain Rogers. If possible I will go to the King myself.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary. What form the Royal ‘pardon’ can take now I have little idea, but matters have gone so far that I feel sure that in some form or other the memory of your dead father will be cleared before the world.”

It was very, very late that night before Bart and Bob repaired to their bunks, but the former was up early to breakfast on board the *Leo* with his good friend her commander, who afterwards accompanied him on shore, where—on the quay—they were saluted by Bob Simmons.

"The men-o'-war are all dressed," remarked Bart.

"Yes—something's up," said Bob. "There go the guns"—as a salvo from guns afloat and ashore shook the air. "What is it, mate?" he asked, turning to a man at his elbow.

"The new Admiral has just hoisted his pennant on the flagship."

"What new Admiral? What's his name?"

"Admiral John Agars."

"Hurrray!" roared Simmons.

"Bravo!" shouted Bart.

"Three times three," cried Bob—and even Captain Caines joined in the cheering.

"A Admiral!—and he desarves it. Reckon he's been doing his duty with a vengeance."

The language was the language of Bob Simmons—the sentiment was the sentiment of all three.

A second excitement followed.

Some scores of prisoners released from French jails were landed from a corvette—Englishmen taken captive by the French, but now exchanged for a batch of Frenchmen taken captive by the English.

Poor fellows—some of them had been in prison for years. How lean and worn and haggard they looked !

One man lagged behind his fellows. As Captain Caines stood, he almost hid this straggler from the view of his two companions, but his own eyes fell full upon him.

As they did so he started violently. Sailors are notoriously superstitious, and now a wild and superstitious idea seized this brawny seaman, and made him even tremble.

He glared, rather than stared, at the unconscious object of his frightened attention as he passed on. He appeared to be straining his ears to make sure that the stranger's feet made a sound as they touched the earth.

"What's the matter, Mr. Caines?" said Bart anxiously.

"Nothing," replied Caines, speaking for once irresolutely. "Wait here," he went on—pulling himself together with a palpable effort—"wait here till I return to you. Don't stir."

He hurried after the disappearing figure of the man whose appearance had had so strange an effect upon him. As he neared him his first agitation returned and increased. Coming up with him, he did a strange thing. He held out his hands—both hands—and touched him as one who sought to touch something uncanny, and yet at the same time feared to do so.

The man turned round and faced him. Cap-

tain Caines fell back with a strange exclamation. His voice seemed unfamiliar even to himself as he cried in startled, affrighted, tones :

“ WILLIAM ARBER—risen from the dead !”

“ Chris—Chris Caines—dear old Chris !”

The two men rushed at each other. Weakened by privation and captivity, tears fell fast and thick from the eyes of the newly-released prisoner.

Neither remembered afterwards what he said to the other, but as Caines tore back to Bart from his old friend's side that friend knew who he was who would so soon be filling his long empty arms.

“ Bart,” panted Captain Caines, “ round that corner stands a half-fainting man. Go to him. No, Bob Simmons—stop you here. Bart, go alone, and at once.”

Wondering and perplexed, Bart obeyed him. He stood face to face with the man he had been bidden to follow.

What did that look on his face mean ? What did those open arms mean ?

It was Bart's heart that spoke and told him.

All evidence, all “ proof,” that it was impossible vanished—even that lonely grave in the southern sea vanished—everything that said nay vanished. His heart spoke—and he *knew* that the arms around him were his father's arms, that the beating bosom to which he was pressed was his father's bosom !

CHAPTER XXVII.

STRANGER TRUTH THAN FICTION.

HIS son, the loyal-hearted Bob Simmons, and his old friend Caines were his only auditors as William Arber, in the privacy of the *Leo's* chief cabin, unfolded the strangest story of his adventures a true story stranger indeed than fiction. Let us listen to his narrative as he told it, although here and there it touches upon circumstances with which we are already acquainted.

The Strange Story of William Arber.

"It will suffice if I begin with my eventful and fateful journey from Yarmouth to London for Messrs. Farrar.

"As you know, I left with the burden upon my mind of a debt of five hundred pounds, for which my creditor was pressing, but which I was quite unable to meet.

"Arrived in London, I set out at once upon the business on which I had been despatched by my principals. About the most important part of that business was the collection of various sums of money due to the firm. In this I was so suc-

cessful that I had soon received on their behalf something like a thousand pounds, the largest item being paid me in Bank of England notes by the house of Stencil, Krooks, and Warren, with whom we did a considerable business.

“Knowing the anxiety of my dear wife, and being myself keenly anxious to get back home in order to beg for further time from my creditor—Peter Rudge, the Norwich solicitor, who had threatened the immediate foreclosure of a mortgage he held upon my home—or, failing to secure the time I wanted, to carry out some plan of paying him off, I decided to return to Yarmouth before my business was fully completed, unless I was now able to complete it in a few days. I felt sure of the consideration of the firm when I should explain to them the urgency of the occasion.

“On the morning of the day after that upon which I had formed this resolution, I met a dear old friend of whom I had lost sight for some years—you Chris Caines, God bless you!”

Here the two united friends shook hands warmly.

“I told you my trouble. With sailor-like alacrity, you drew five hundred pounds in notes of the Bank of England from your pocket-book then and there, and put them in my hands. A few minutes afterwards we parted, never to meet again until to-day—you were then actually on the way to the docks to join your ship.”

Caines nodded.

"The notes you generously lent me I placed amongst the other moneys I carried upon my person—the moneys of my employers.

"Later in the day I met a trustworthy acquaintance who was starting for Yarmouth by that night's coach. By him, with a letter, I sent Peter Rudge his five hundred pounds—sent them in bank-notes. I made up the notes to the required amount indiscriminately—that is to say, I took them almost as they came from the paper-money in my possession, not discriminating between the actual notes I had received for Farrar's and those of which I had so gratefully accepted the loan in the morning from"

"Me," said Captain Caines. "But I can prove—I have proved—that amongst the notes you sent to Rudge were some that had only left my pocket a few hours earlier."

"But it was proved at my trial that some were notes that I had received from Stencil's for my firm. To this I shall come shortly.

"Handing over the sealed packet to its friendly bearer, I walked with him to the coach-office, where he booked his seat. Shortly after leaving him, I met the cashier of Stencil's—a man named Melling. This man persuaded me to accompany him home. My acquaintance with him was slight, but on account of his influence with the house he served—customers, as I have said, of the house I served—I did not like to refuse his invitation.

“He took me to a lonely house in the eastern outskirts of London. On the way we were joined by an ill-favored fellow of whom Melling said ‘This honest man serves the firm at the docks, and lives in my house.’ I remember this remark distinctly, and that I thought the companionship an ill-sorted one.

“Darkness had fallen when we reached the house. When I left it I know not, and never shall know.

“Melling offered me a glass of wine, and I drank it. I remember nothing more until I awoke again to consciousness in the London Hospital, many days afterwards. As to the interval, my mind was, and is now, a blank.

“But even before I was fit to leave my bed the officers of the law carried me off to prison.

“When I entered Jacob Melling’s house I had in my possession a thousand pounds, the property of my employers. It was charged against me that when picked up in the road I had only one or two paltry notes left, stitched inside the lining of my mantle, and that the rest I had misappropriated. It was proved against me at the trial that I had been in sore straits for money, and that I had despatched no less a sum than five hundred pounds to Peter Rudge. The fact that this amount was partly made up of notes which I had received for Farrar’s told heavily against me, for my explanation was scouted. The theory of the prosecution was that I had sent Rudge his money

for the sake of my wife and child, and had concealed or made away with the rest.

“Melling and his companion swore that I had never entered the house to which they took me.

“In vain was pleaded on my behalf the improbability that I should make my payment to Rudge in notes of which a number could be easily traced as having come into my possession as Farrar’s agent. I was convicted, and sentenced to fourteen years’ penal servitude. Considering the doom that might have been passed upon me, my judge was merciful.

“I was hurried to the hulks.”

Shudder after shudder shook the worn frame as memory recalled that awful time.

“My time on the . . . my time there was short. But before the transport to which I was soon transferred sailed, Jacob Melling joined our miserable company. I got to know that he had been sentenced by the same merciful judge to twenty years’ transportation beyond seas, but I knew nothing more.

“Of the first weeks, the first months of that awful voyage I need not speak, would that I could cease to think. Herded with the vilest of the vile—everything gone, all lost, all lost—name, character, position—home, my wife, my boy, my darling boy—O God, O God!”

Bart put his arm round his father’s neck and kissed him. Captain Caines turned aside his head. The face of Bob Simmons underwent some extra-

ordinary contortions, which ended in an honest burst of tears.

"I was stricken with convict fever. At merciful intervals I was unconscious. On the first night of my convalescence I woke to witness, and take part in, a scene of horror which transcended any possible description of it.

"The ship was burning. The crew had deserted her. The convicts were loose. Drunk—mad—raving—they struggled and cursed and fought. Some flung themselves into the sea, others were frizzling in the flames where they fell, blaspheming Almighty God as they died.

"There was death in the madness of that wild mass of unchained felons, death in the red fire which flared up masts and shrouds from the blazing decks, death in the black waters upon which we tossed.

"There were two boats—and hundreds of men. Crammed to their gunwales the boats got off. One went down. The stronger men on the other lightened her by seizing the weaker and flinging them overboard, and so pulled away clear of the vessel.

"Every attempt to restore order was as hopeless as to attempt to control flood or flame.

"With the help of three men—convicts like myself, one named Tremayne, one Jackson, and the third White—I put together a raft. We pitched on to our flimsy craft whatever came first to hand in the way of stores, leaped on as it touched

the water, and drifted off at the mercy of wind and current.

“For seven days and seven nights after that first awful night on board the raft we so drifted—whither we had no idea. After the second day, we had not a morsel to eat, not a drop to drink.

“The sun blazed above us like a ball of fire—the sea was like molten glass.

“As darkness fell at the close of the seventh day—he waited till the darkness came; murderer though he was, he waited till the darkness came, so that none might see his face—Jackson said: ‘There are four of us, starving—dying of starvation and thirst. Each has still flesh, each has still blood. It is better that three should live and one die than that all should die. We’ll cast lots who shall die to give the others a chance of living.’

“I had expected the horrible proposition before. It had come at last.

“‘Let the thing be done to-night,’ said a sullen voice. I think it was White’s.

“‘It shall not be done at all,’ I declared. ‘It shall never be done.’

“‘Who says that?’

“‘I do, Jackson.’

“‘Who’ll prevent it, if the rest of us agree to it?’

“‘I will.’

“‘One against three?’

“‘Yes—I’m good enough for three such men as

you are now, and you all know it. I've lived a sober and temperate life—your lives have been—well, what you know they have been. The difference between the life that I have led and the lives that you have lived is the measure of the difference between us now. Our privations, our misery, and sufferings have been the same—night and day for a week past—but they've told on me less than they have on you. My mind is clearer, my body not so weak, my hand steadier—to strike if necessary. The fever has left me better, not worse, than it found me.'

"This really seemed to be the case. I had borne up wonderfully, and felt scarcely any fear of anything that the three of them could manage to do, so long as I kept on the alert against treachery.

"A silence of several minutes followed my speech. The fact was I had somehow acquired a certain sort of authority, hitherto not openly acknowledged, over my three fellow-unfortunates. Now that a crisis in our fate had arrived it was telling upon them.

" 'What are we to do then,' asked Jackson, 'if we don't do—*it* ?'

" 'Aye,' chimed in another voice, 'that's the question—what are we to do ?'

" 'Trust in God,' I replied, 'and face whatever is in store for us like men.'

" 'God !' cried the three scornful voices. Then one of the three—I know not which—asked an

awful question. But a mocking tongue said in the darkness :

“ ‘What has God to do with us, or what have we to do with God ?’

“I wasn't silent long. I only recoiled momentarily from that taunting, terrible query. Thank God I had a Christian's faith, a Christian's hope, a Christian's confidence. The spirit of prophesy, as it were, seemed to fall upon me. It was as though an Angel wetted my parched lips that I might speak of God and of Christ out there on that open raft—drifting, drifting, drifting over the dark sea in the blacker darkness of the night.

“At last I prayed—prayed aloud. I lifted up my thin hands to the black, invisible sky. I held up everything to God—our sins, our misery, our temptation—our sore and bitter needs.

“As I finished I had a vision of my wife and our boy. As one sees in a trance or dream, I seemed to see them on their knees and seemed to know that they were praying for me.

“I began the ‘Our Father,’ and repeated it slowly through. Then I fell on my face, sobbing like a child.

“And soon we all four slept.

“In the middle of the night Tremayne woke me. I felt his bony fingers clutching me, and I sprang up with a start.

“ ‘No, no,’ he said, ‘it's all right. There's no danger of—*it*—to-night. But say that again. I heard it once before. Say it again.’”

“‘Say what again?’

“‘“Our Father.” I don’t know exactly what it means, but say it again.’

“‘Poor Tremayne! Poor fellow-sinner! how much shall be forgiven such ignorance as yours.

“‘Who was it you said died for us—died to save us? I never heard about it.’

“‘The Gospel has been preached in strange places and in strange circumstances, but was ever stranger place, were ever stranger circumstances, than those in which now a convict preached it to a convict?

“‘Morning broke. Its first red streaks glimmered on yellow sand and green trees. The raft was drifting straight for a tiny cluster of islands.

“‘It was no shame to any one of us that in our weakness and rapture of joy we all cried and laughed hysterically. The sweetest music we ever heard in the world was the grating of our rickety planks upon the shore.

“‘We found water, we devoured the fruits.

“‘For about sixteen months, according to our calculations, we lived upon the island upon which we had been cast. We built a hut, we trapped birds, we caught fish. In the faint hope that a ship might come near enough to see it and rescue us, we hoisted a signal.

“‘When this was first suggested, White and Tremayne objected.

“‘“If we’re rescued,’ they said, ‘what are we rescued for? To complete our sentences.’

“‘No fear,’ laughed Jackson : ‘no finishing sentences for us. Somehow we chucked enough plain clothes on the raft to go round. If a ship ever comes to save us, I was steward of the transport. You can have been the cook, White. Tremayne can pass himself off as what he likes. Arber had better call himself an officer or a passenger—say a friend of the captain’s who was so anxious for a voyage that he didn’t object to the . . . let’s call it mixed company of a transport. He and Tremayne can change their names if they choose—Jackson and White are common enough names not to need changing.”

“The idea was not only clever but practicable. At last came the opportunity of putting it into practise.

“But shortly before that time arrived Tremayne fell ill. At first he suffered from some sort of low fever, but this ended in raging delirium.

“I helped to nurse him till I required nursing myself, for I was stricken down with the same symptoms, which developed in the same way.

“When Jackson and White burst into the hut crying that a ship was in sight, had seen our signal, and was heading for the islands, Tremayne lay in one corner of the hut and I in another. I was just sufficiently in my senses to be able to hear and understand all that passed, though I grasped it more clearly afterwards.

“‘Mates,’ said Tremayne, ‘there’s no ship coming for *me*, though I’m going on a voyage—a

longer one than you are. I'm dying—but maybe the Judge will let me off my sentence. I've asked him. The chap who taught me how to, is lying over there, ill and suffering, all through nursing me. Now before I get my discharge from this here life, I want to make certain sure of one thing. There's a danger that my chum—that's what he's been to me—my chum over yonder—has got to face with the rest of yer—of course if he lives ; and now that help is coming he's got a chance that I missed till too late. I mean the danger of being spotted after all. If this ship what's a-coming to take you off lands you in a British port, he and you too, Jackson and White—may be cross-questioned and found out after all. If so the game's up—and you'd better ha' died here along o' me.

“ ‘ Now to help my chum in case o' this danger coming to him, I ain't going to die here at all, but he is.’ ”

“ ‘ What ? ’ ”

“ ‘ He's going to die, not me. When the men land from the ship and point to my dead body and ask “ Who's he ? ” you won't say “ Dick Tremayne,” but you'll answer “ William Arber, convict.” When you bury me put that name over my head. It'll all be in the ship's log. It'll be proof that the real William Arber ain't William Arber. If the need arise my dodge will save him from being iden . . . iden . . . identified. He can sail away now without a fear. If the law wants William

Arber it'll find his grave here. Bury me quick, and they'll put it in the log-book where William Arber's grave is.

“ ‘I ain't sure as my chum would agree to my deception, but he can't hear me—or if he hears he can't understand. He thinks he's at home with his wife and their boy—I hope he will be with 'em soon. He's been talking to 'em and fondling of 'em.’

“ Tremayne had not said all this in one breath. He had spoken with difficulty, and was almost done up as he finished. ‘Jackson, promise me—promise me, White—that you'll do as I've said. It can't be wrong—and it's—the only thing—I—can do—for the bloke what taught me—“ Our Father.” ’

“ I wanted to speak : I tried to : but I swooned before I could utter a word.

“ The promise exacted by the poor dying fellow from the other two convicts was faithfully kept. Unconscious—and thought to be in an almost hopeless state—I was carried on board the schooner *Coronet*, to find myself, when I recovered, treated with every kindness and respect as Mr. Richard Tremayne, a passenger-friend of the commander of the burnt transport *British Monarch*. I found that Jackson had even told a plausible story as to how I came to be left behind on the burning wreck. It was by his suggestion, too, that poor Tremayne's name was transferred to me instead of a new name being invented for me.

“ ‘Better stick to the name we know,’ he had said cunningly ; ‘we might make a mess of it with a strange name. The skipper of this schooner isn’t the sort of man to be suspicious or trouble to make enquiries. It wouldn’t matter if he did, for we shall cut our lucky sharp enough when we land.’

“ ‘The story of Jackson and White that they were respectively steward and cook, that I was a passenger and Tremayne a convict named William Arber, was accepted readily enough.

“ ‘We may thank our lucky stars for our plain clothes,’ said Jackson. ‘We burned three suits of our Government uniforms just in time, but kept Tremayne’s to back up our yarn, and buried him in it.’

“ ‘I can finish quickly now.

“ ‘All went well with the *Coronet* till she neared the Bay of Biscay. She was heading to round Cape Finisterre when her long, slow voyage was brought to an abrupt conclusion by a Spanish man-o’-war, which expeditiously made a prize of her.

“ ‘Most of us—of course every man on board was a prisoner—were sent to Santiago. There we remained until Spain last year signed a treaty of peace and alliance with England and declared war against her old ally France. Then, on board a Spanish transport, we left Spain for our native land, free at last.

“ ‘But not free for long. Before we were out of

the Bay of Biscay we ran into a thick fog, which lasted for days, during which the Spanish officers seemed to be in a fog in another sense, for it was evident that they were uncertain as to their exact whereabouts, the perplexity caused by the fog being increased by baffling winds.

“When the weather cleared, it cleared suddenly—and we found ourselves under the guns of the French batteries at Brest. In the fog, we had run through the British ships watching the port.

“We had exchanged a Spanish prison for a French one. Of my sufferings in each I need not speak now. My story told, I am anxious to hear yours again, Bart—my son—and at greater length. I don’t seem to have grasped yet all that you have been doing. I don’t realize the full meaning of what you have told me. Tell me again. Your story is as strange to me as mine to you. Considering the circumstances in which they were sent off, I scarcely wonder that not one of the few letters I was able to despatch to your mother ever reached her.

“My heart breaks again as I think of all she has suffered. But thank God I can feel an unquestioning faith that in all, in everything, a purpose too kind as well as too wise for us ever to understand has been worked out. And now I am content to leave the final issues of all, of everything, in His Hands—the Hands that have been over you and over her and over me in all the bitter years of our separation and our suffer-

ing. Tell me again, Bart, of mother and yourself."

The cabin door opened and shut very quietly—and father and son were together alone.

Later in the day William Arber surrendered himself to the authorities with a statement of his identity. He was of course detained in custody.

On the evening tide the *Leo* and the *Eva Bryant* sailed in company for the port of London.

Bart left for London by the night coach, *en route* for Gorleston.

From Gorleston he was to return to London to join the staunch friends at present proceeding there on board the brig and the bark, with them to await the decision of the Crown.

But with what light hearts could that decision now be anticipated!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BREAKING OF THE DAWN.

ON just such a night as that upon which he reached home from Snaresbrook College two years before, Bart Arber arrived at Yarmouth from Portsmouth.

The wind blew gustfully from the sea, and as he crossed the river its dark waters lapped the banks fretfully. The air was bleak and cold—but his heart was warm within him. He had come home now to tell “mother” the joyful story that “father” was found at last, that he would soon be restored to them without a stain upon his name.

With long, light strides he stepped out for the little house upon the cliff.

His heart beat quickly, his pulses throbbed, a decent-sized whale seemed to rise in his throat, and a suspicious moisture wetted his eyes, as at last he saw the gleaming of the distant light from the window of the room in which he and his mother had knelt to offer the prayer that God in His own good time and way had answered.

She would be in that room now, all unconscious

that he was so near her—so rapidly coming nearer still. He must be careful how he entered—above all, he must be careful, very careful, how he told her.

Very quietly he opened the wicket-gate, and very softly he walked through the garden round to the back door, upon which he tapped very cautiously.

Old Biddy almost screamed when she saw him, but his quick gesture stopped her just in time. A few hurried words passed between them in whispers, and then Bart walked with noiseless feet to his mother's sitting-room, and silently turned the handle of the door.

The lamp stood in the little recess by the window. His mother sat in the firelight, its glow falling on her face and burnishing the silver of her hair, and the gold of the hair of—Katie Caines !

Hand clasped in hand, there sat together his mother and his little sweetheart. His own mother, then, was the "friend ashore" in whose care Captain Caines had left his daughter.

For long delightful moments he gazed upon them—these two pure and holy women whom he loved. And then :

"MOTHER !—Katie !"

Far into the night they sat up, for Bart's story took long to tell.

Beginning with the day he left home for the

second time, to take ship with Bob Simmons for Botany Bay, he told of his arrival in Sydney and the eventful wanderings in the bush of himself and his faithful chum. Then of their embarkation with Jacob Melling on the *Eva Bryant* and the startling identification of the felon by old Mr. Stencil. Next came the story of the lonely island grave.

Tears streamed down Mrs. Arber's gentle face, and Katie too wept in loving sympathy.

"But he isn't there, mother," cried Bart, "he isn't there. God has spared him to us—father is alive, and in a few days will be free."

"Alive?"

"Free?"

"Yes, mother. Yes, Katie."

And Bart finished the tale he had come to tell.

"Take me to him—my husband, my husband—take me to him. Take me to his arms, Bart—take me to his dear, suffering heart!"

"Yes, mother; we will go to him together."

Bart walked to the window, moved away the lamp, and looked out towards the eastern sky.

"See, mother. Look, my mother—the night is almost passed, and the dawn is at hand."

"Yes, Bart. Yes, my son. Our night is almost passed, and for us all the Dawn is breaking."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE KING'S PARDON.

BIDDY was left in proud charge of Cliff House. Mrs. Arber, Katie, and Bart traveled to London, whence mother and son were to hasten to Portsmouth. Traveling then was very different from traveling now. Twice the coach broke down, and twice the road was blocked by heavy falls of snow. Thus whole days were lost. But the capital was safely reached at last. Bart left his mother and Katie Caines at the old "Three Nuns" hotel, and set out by himself for the docks. where with all speed he boarded the *Leo*.

Captain Caines met him with an open letter in his hands. He placed it in Bart's without a word. It was a communication from his solicitors.

"In re the matter of the petition to the Crown in the case of William Arber, we beg to inform you that we have this day received a communication from the Home Secretary to the effect that as a result of the inquiry instituted herein, and having regard to the recent additional affidavits which have been placed before him, he feels justified in

advising His Majesty to exercise his Royal prerogative in the Pardon of the said William Arber. ”

“ Thank God,” said Bart.

“ Yes, thank God,” said Caines, as man and boy shook hands.

“ Where’s Bob Simmons ? ”

He was soon in evidence. His face beamed as he heard the news.

“ Bob, dear old chum, give us your hand.”

“ Aye, aye, my lad—and my heart with it.”

“ Bob, I can’t do it.”

“ Can’t do what ? ”

“ Can’t say it. Can’t get it out.”

“ Get what out ? ” asked Bob with some anxiety.

“ What’s in my heart. I can’t get out—in words—what it is in heart to say—to *you*. You’re my chum, Bob—you’re my big brother. Through thick and thin—through fights afloat and ashore, through every peril of land and sea, by day and by night—through all, through everything—you’ve stood by me, stuck to me.

“ It’s no good, Bob—I *can’t* say what I feel—I can’t get it out.”

“ Look here, Master Bart,” said Bob Simmons threateningly, “ stow that sort of talk once for all. If ever you start paying off that kind o’ jaw-tackle again, you may have cause to be glad that I’m a peaceable man.”

Captain Caines accompanied Bart to the hotel-door : the latter entered alone.

But while the happy tears were still wet upon the cheeks of his old friend's wife, Caines joined the little group. Later on, Bob Simmons, Mr. Stencil (who arrived with three new complicated disorders), and Captain Rogers were sent for.

And what an evening they all had of it !

The next day Bart and his mother took a post-chaise for Portsmouth. They didn't know it, but ---a few hours before them on the highway—rode a King's Messenger, carrying with him a document which bore the Royal sign-manual—the document which, on the following morning, opened wide the doors of William Arber's prison, from which he emerged to be folded—oh, so tightly—in his wife's arms.

The Night had passed. The Day had dawned. For it was The King's Pardon.

The re-united family spent several days in town before returning home.

On one of these days they visited good old Doctor Barfield at Snaresbrook College, and on this occasion Katie Caines accompanied them. Bart's face mantled with pleasure because of the interest Katie showed in all the places and scenes he pointed out to her as associated with his schoolboy days.

His request that Doctor Barfield would permit his visit to be signalized by a cessation of study in all the classes for the rest of the day was instantly granted, and the emancipated boys, with three

ringing cheers for the old Snaresbrookian, rushed into the playground.

"Katie, will you walk a little way through the forest with me? I should like to show you what is called the Eagle Pond—the lake where we used to skate in the winter and fish in the fishing season."

"Yes, Bart," replied Katie.

The wintry sun was shining brightly that frosty morning, and the snow-encrusted branches above their heads gleamed and flashed as though a shower of rare and precious gems had fallen on them in the night. But no jewels could have shone quite so brightly as did Katie's eyes.

Bart had something to say to her and wanted to say it. He had made up his mind to say it. He meant to say it. The difficulty was that—once again—he didn't know how to say what he intended to say. He tried to say it before they reached the pond, but couldn't "get it out." He tried again when they reached the pond—but it *wouldn't* come out. He made a third attempt as they returned from the pond—and this time he "got it out" somehow.

"Katie," he said, "I want to ask you a question."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

He thought she would help him a little here, but she didn't, so he went desperately on.

"I want to ask you how old you think people ought to be before they marry each other?"

“What a strange question !”

“Never mind what sort of a question it is. It is a question.”

“Yes—it is a great question,” agreed Katie provokingly because equivocally.

“Well, how would *you* answer the question ?”

“By asking another.”

“What would that be ?”

“I should ask why you want to know ?”

“I’ll tell you soon—if . . if you’ll let me. But won’t you answer my question first ?”

“Let me see—what was it ?”

“Why, it isn’t a minute ago that I asked it ! How old do you think people ought to be before they marry each other ?”

“Well, I should think—of course I don’t know anything about it, but I should *think*—that age isn’t the first thing to be thought about. There’s something to be thought of long before that.”

“What is it ?”

“The first question is, do they . . . the . . the people you’re talking about—that is, any people—the first question is, do they love each other very, very much ?”

“Terrifically,” exclaimed Bart. “That is to say—look here—I’ll answer for the boy . . . no, no, no, I mean the man. Let’s keep to him for . . . for the present. I feel more at home with him. The . . the Man . . . loves tremendously. How old do you say he ought to be before he tries to marry”

"Whom?"

"Her."

"Oh!"

"Katie?"

"Yes?"

"Well?"

"I should think he ought to be thirty years old."

"Twenty-nine, perhaps, in some cases?"

"Ye . . es."

"In special cases twenty-eight?"

"I . . I'm sure I don't know."

"A good many get married at twenty-seven."

"Do they?"

"Yes—and at twenty-six. But before marriage comes the engagement. Now, do you think twenty-five is too old for that?"

"No. But isn't it too young?"

"No, not at all," said Bart firmly. "In fact, many people are engaged at twenty-four."

"Are they?"

"Yes. And frequently at twenty-three. Don't you think that in special cases they might make it twenty-two?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But per . . . haps—perhaps, you know, in very, very special cases . . ."

"In very, *very* special cases it would be twenty-one for the Man and twenty for . . ."

"For whom?"

"For Her. Katie?"

"Yes?"

"There's not much difference between twenty-one and twenty, is there?"

"Not . . not very much, I suppose."

"And between twenty and nineteen there's no difference at all. I've heard of—of a Man—being engaged at nineteen to a sweetheart of eighteen. *I'm* nineteen!"

"No—not till your next birthday."

"That'll come soon enough. Do you remember what you gave me on my seventeenth birthday, Katie?"

"Yes, Bart."

They walked on in silence till the College was in sight.

"Katie, all sorts of things have personal applications—even calculations," declared Bart vaguely but emphatically. "I'm a year older than you."

"Yes."

"Then if I became engaged at nineteen *you* would be"

"Eighteen," said Katie, very very softly.

Slow as was the pace at which they finished their walk, they did not feel that it was growing colder. For though it was the Winter-time of Nature it was the Spring-time of their love.

But come away, boys, we mustn't listen to the whispered words that are passing between them now. Besides, there's a conversation going on between Captain Caines and Bob Simmons on

board the good ship *Leo* that I want you to overhear.

"Simmons, I want to talk to you."

"Exceedingly good, sir."

"Sit down."

"Thank'ee, sir."

"Bob," goes on that worthy's old skipper and friend, "I've been overhauling three things—myself, my ship, and my banking account. To begin with the last, I find that's all right—better than I thought."

"Hurray, sir. Hurray, hearty."

"Next, as to the brig. She's knocked about. She's in need of repairs alow and aloft. I shall lay her up. She'll have to go into dry dock for the next few months."

"I thought so, sir, when I came aboard at Portsmouth."

"In the last place, I find I'm knocked about a bit too. In fact, I don't feel so young as I used to."

"That's a complaint we're all liable to, cap'en, as we sails on in life."

"Quite so. Well, as my time is coming on to feel it more and more after the hard life I've led, I'm going to retire. I shall sail the brig for two more voyages, and then give up the sea and settle ashore."

"Well, sir, all good luck and happiness to ye."

"Thank you, Bob. Now listen. You and I have known each other a good many years."

"We have, sir. And I never sailed with a

better skipper or aboard a more comfortable ship, and don't want to, either."

"That's all right. The point is, I *know* you, Bob Simmons. I shall say nothing more on that score, for what I think of you I prove by the offer I'm going to make to you. In the first place, don't look out for a ship. I want you to remain in London and keep an eye on the repairing and refitting of this ship."

"Ex-ceedingly good."

"To go on. As you know, I carry two mates. On the first of the two more last voyages I shall make, you will ship as my second."

Bob's face lights up, but before he can speak Captain Caines goes straight on.

"During the voyage you will study navigation as hard as possible, because on the next voyage you will sail with me as chief."

"Cap'en Caines, I"

"After that voyage I shall command the *Leo* no longer. As her captain, Bob Simmons, *you will take my place.*"

Bob springs from his seat as though he had been shot. He gasps, but can't speak. The only expression of his feelings of which he is at present capable is in that old foot-shuffling pantomime of his—his right toes are scratching his left leg with unprecedented energy and vigor. He feels as Bart felt the other day—when it was Bart who was trying to express his gratitude. Like him, he stammers :

"I can't do it. I can't get it out."

"I understand," says Captain Caines. "Don't try to."

"Has the world stopped, or is it still going round?" soliloquizes Bob Simmons during the rest of that day. "Here's just a ordinary kind of peaceable A. B. who just tries to do his duty in a ordinary kind of peaceable way," he mutters to himself half indignantly, "and he goes and gets made mates and cap'ensies of!"

Bart, his father, and his mother, traveled home together. The news of their return had preceded them, and, to their astonishment, a crowd of old friends, augmented by a larger crowd of strangers, awaited the arrival of their coach. Scores of hands were stretched out to seize in welcome the hand of William Arber, scores and hundreds of stentorian voices rent the air in welcoming shouts. When, in very weariness, the right hand of the "pardoned" ex-convict hung by his side the people seized his left, and squeezed and shook it till it too was "unfit for service." Then—as though they as well had not had enough handshaking already—they turned to his wife and son, and wrung their four hands over and over again.

The fact was that the story of Bart and his father had by this time been published far and wide, and some days before had reached Yarmouth.

And this was the "welcome home" of father, wife, and son.

Gently forcing their way at last through the cheering multitude, the heroes and heroine of the reception found that they were not to be permitted to walk to Gorleston. A carriage waited for them on the outskirts of the crowd. They would fain have walked, but friendly violence forced them in. The door was slammed, the coachman cracked his whip, and under a last salvo of deafening "hurrahs!" the carriage dashed off.

Alighting at the gate of the "little house upon the cliff," William Arber, with the tender touch upon him of wife and son, entered the home from which for years he had been exiled.

For the first and only time in her life, poor old Biddy fainted. When she recovered, she announced that a gentleman had been waiting some hours in the drawing-room to see "the master."

"The master" opened the door of the room, and stepped back as his visitor moved forward.

"Mr. Farrar," he said sternly, "I bear you no ill-will. But I cannot forget your share in the cruel prosecution that drove me from wife and child and home. What are you doing in my house? Leave it, please."

"I am here," answered Mr. Farrar, "to ask the forgiveness of a wronged and innocent man. I am here to tell him that my old heart rejoices with him and his at this happy moment. I am here to ask him to take my hand."

"And he takes it," said the generous-hearted Arber warmly.

"I want to see your son. I want to shake hands with the boy who saved his father."

Bart was soon in the room, and had some difficulty in releasing his digits from the grip of his father's old employer, who, before he left, eased his mind of another burden upon it.

"Amends I can never make," he said. "But if you refuse what I am about to ask, you will add to the remorse I must always suffer. My business is larger than ever, and I am now the sole surviving partner. I am getting too advanced in years to cope with it. Your value"—turning to Arber *père*—"I know of old, old friend. Of *such* young blood as my young friend Bart's here the old house is in sore need. Come into the firm, both of you.

Before the good ship *Leo* sailed away again—trim and taut as ever—the few shares in her not belonging to her captain had been sold.

They were bought in the name of William Arber. Both he and his son had accepted the offer pressed upon them, and were settling well into their duties in the great business of Farrar and Company.

"At home" in the dear white villa on the breezy cliffs of Gorleston, besides father, mother, Biddy, and himself, there was—according to Bart—"an angel in the house," her earthly name being Katie Caines.

CHAPTER XXX.

LATER DAYS.

MY story is told. But before we part company with the friends to whom it has introduced us, let us see a little of them "in later days."

At the little white house on the cliffs where grandfather and grandmother live, the birthday of the eldest of Bart and Katie's children is being celebrated—a sturdy urchin who has reached to-day his tenth year.

Bart and his wife live in the big house that has been built close by on the top of the road that leads to Yarmouth. He is a partner now in the firm of Messrs. Farrar, Arber, and Company, from which his father retired a few years ago.

It is quite a large group gathered round the old hearth to-night—for besides Bart, Katie, and their little ones, two other visitors are there—always honored, always welcome guests, whether they visit the big house or this smaller one. They are Katie's father and dear old Bob Simmons. He too has left the sea at last, and lives near his old captain in Yarmouth town. The *Leo* was luckier than ever during the time that he commanded her,

and Bob has quite a deep store of "yellow-boys" laid by.

He is never so happy as when playing with Bart's children—they clamber all over him, and pull his hair, and thump his great chest with their tiny fists to feel how hard it is—the hard chest that covers such a tender heart.

How he loves those children!

But not more than the children love him.

"I had a letter from London to-day," says Bart—"Mr. Stencil never forgets Willie's birthday."

"What's his last new fatal attack?" laughs Bob.

"A five-syllabled one."

"It won't kill him. He'll live through it to enjoy hundreds of diseases yet."

By and by the talk turns, as it often does, to old times—to those stirring days through the trials and adventures of which we accompanied "the Boy who Saved his Father."

The talk lasts long, but it ends as William Arber rises and places a Bible on the table, old Biddy gliding in and taking a seat near the door.

"Grandfather" reads of a Home where there shall be no more parting, of a time when there shall be "no more sea."

Then they kneel. Grandfather and grandmother clasp each other's hands as the former prays.

He ends his prayer as he ended the petition that he and "mother" and Bart knelt to offer on the

first night of their return home together years ago : with a fervent thanksgiving for his own deliverance, at the foot of the Throne of the Heavenly Grace he asks for all their shortcomings

THE KING'S PARDON.

THE END.

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